

HIS TWO WIVES



Mary Clemmer

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HIS TWO WIVES

BY

MARY CLEMMER

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ALICE AND PHOEBE CARY," "MEN, WOMEN,
AND THINGS," ETC.

THIRTEENTH EDITION



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge

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TO
MY PUBLISHERS,

WHOSE

KINDLY PATIENCE HAS SO OFTEN WAITED ON A WEARY HAND

AND WHOSE FAITH IN IT, BEFORE IT WAS WRITTEN,

INSPIRED THIS BOOK,

IT IS NOW GRATEFULLY DEDICATED.

MY HUSBAND

THESE THINGS ARE NOT TO BE
READ BY ANY OTHER PERSON
THAN THE ONE TO WHOM THEY
ARE SENT. IT IS THE PROPERTY
OF THE GIFT.

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HIS TWO WIVES.

CHAPTER I.

THE MARRIAGE.

WHEN Agnes Darcy was married to Cyril King the ladies of Ulm declared that she "came down in the world." Nevertheless they all went to Grace Church to see the sight. They would not have missed it for anything.

"If I couldn't be married without crying, I wouldn't be married at all," said Mrs. Flint.

"I don't see what she has to cry for," said Mrs. Stone.

"She was a drudge at her aunt's. Tell me that she married for love! She married for a home."

"Well, I doubt if it's much of a home Cyril King will give her, in the long run," said Mrs. Sage, sententiously. "He comes of flighty stock. I know they tell great stories of his success, but it is not in his blood to be steady-minded. Look at his father before him."

"Look at her father before her," said Mrs. Twilight. "In my opinion Ulm will never produce another young man the equal of John Darcy. Cry

It was his blood in her that was crying. I cried, myself, looking at her there at the altar. Her hand in his. To think of the chances, — I might say in any marriage, — certainly in this! Such conflicting elements of nature. Think of it! John Darcy's daughter marrying Tim King's son! Who would have believed it possible, when the two men were young! There are just two chances for her happiness: one if she never grows, the other if she never wakes up."

"Grows! She got her growth two years ago, at least," observed Mrs. Flint. "And I doubt if she will ever be any wider awake. For my part I could never find out what you think so superior in Agnes Darcy, Mrs. Twilight. She hasn't an accomplishment, not one. And she certainly was always dumb enough, in my presence."

"I heard the same said of her father twenty-five years ago," replied Mrs. Twilight. "He was so retiring, people — some people — called him stupid. Didn't he wake up? Didn't he grow? You know, Mrs. Flint, such sermons were never preached in Ulm as he preached. And he died before he was thirty" (with a sigh). "Agnes is her father's true child. She looks like him, and she is like him."

"I don't know where you find it, Mrs. Twilight. She looks like him, to be sure; but I never heard a human being, but you, call Agnes Darcy smart."

"Smart! She is more than smart, as I'm afraid she will find out to her sorrow, some day."

"I never saw such a croaker as you are, Mrs. Twilight. Ought not Cyril King's wife to be smart, and more than smart, to match him? If it is some coming

down so far as family goes, nobody — nobody in the world, but you, Mrs. Twilight — will say that as a woman Agnes Darcy is handsome enough, or bright enough, to be Cyril King's wife."

"And the world is full of fools and knaves to tell him so; if not now, sometime. How plain I see that time," said Mrs. Twilight, prophetically. "Then, Agnes Darcy will find out what she is. What she is, or may become, as yet she has never dreamed. I know Cyril King, and I know there is every possibility in him, but the one to make a wife happy."

This conversation went on along the maple-shaded streets of Ulm, as the ladies slowly sauntered homeward from the church in which they had seen Cyril King and Agnes Darcy made husband and wife. It was a still September afternoon, soft to languor. The quality of the atmosphere seemed to preclude rapid locomotion; the ladies were taking their time with their feet as well as with their tongues. But at this moment a slight figure, deeply veiled, hurried past, without a glance or motion of recognition.

"Linda Kane!" exclaimed Mrs. Flint, as the swiftly-gliding woman passed beyond hearing. "She has been to the train to see them off. I must say I should think Cyril King might provide his cousin with a carriage at such a time."

"The less Cyril King sees of his cousin at such a time, the better he feels, you may be sure of that," remarked Mrs. Sage. "I've had no opinion of him since I heard of his goings on in that quarter."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Sage?"

"I mean that he began to make love to Linda

Kane when he was a little boy, and has kept it up ever since. I haven't a doubt the last word he said to her before going to church, was that he loves her ; but she is his cousin, and cousins mustn't marry, and so forth."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Sage! she needn't be such a simpleton as to believe him. Everybody knows that he has been in love with Agnes Darcy since she wore short dresses. It's all stuff, his making love to Linda Kane. Didn't they grow up together? She is all the sister he ever knew. Then look at her. It doesn't stand to reason."

"Does any love-making ever stand to reason? I never knew it to; but I do know that Cyril King made love to Linda Kane, that he has done so since he was engaged to Agnes Darcy."

"How can you know it, Mrs. Sage?"

"Mrs. Kating, my washerwoman, heard him. They were in the summer-house, and she was hanging up clothes in the garden. The vines were too thick for them to see her. She heard every word they said, and told me."

The subject of this information had already disappeared from sight. She passed down a side street and entered a small white house standing in a garden. She passed rapidly up the stairs, and in a moment more was bolting, inside, the door of her own up-stair little room. Throwing back her veil, she rushed to a chair beside the bed, and burying her face in a pillow, half smothered the sobs which broke forth with a passion that would not be restrained. They sank at last into a deep wail, low and piercing, and sad enough to have

been the cry of one of Dante's lost souls. In the midst of it, she suddenly arose, and going to a little wooden box standing on the bureau, she unlocked it, and took from it a picture. It was an old daguerreotype in a worn and faded case, the picture of a very young man. Laying it on the pillow before her she pressed it beneath her face, then suddenly snatched it up and kissed it passionately. Then holding it before her tearless eyes, she wailed, "Gone! gone! forever gone!"

"Can it be, Cyril, that you have left me? How can I live without you? Forever, ever without you? I cannot. I will not. Oh, Cyril, Cyril!"

The name died in the long, low wail, and she again smothered her own cry in the muffling pillow. The scene is piteous. The room, spotlessly clean, is bare of comforts. It is evidently a working, as well as sleeping room. A large basket stands by the chair beside the window, filled with unfinished garments. Others completed and neatly folded lie upon the table. A small bureau and looking-glass, a cottage bedstead, a few wooden chairs, and a washstand, complete the furniture. There are no pictures on the wall, no carpet on the floor, save here and there a faded strip. The wail sinks lower and lower as if from physical exhaustion. The woman slowly lifts her face at last, and draws a thin hand down over it, as if trying to smooth somewhat of anguish out of the features. She has the figure of a young girl, but the face of a woman who has lived not less than thirty years. This moment it looks as if she had lived many more; for it is one of the faces which passion makes old before its time

Even our pity for it cannot make it a pleasant face. As its contortions merge into a look of stony coldness, its habitual expression begins to steal out into the features. No one feature is particularly ugly, but the combination formed by all is not agreeable. The lips are thin and severe, the eyes are brilliant but fitful, and can be furtive. At will they are capable of a steady, scrutinizing gaze, that never fails to make uncomfortable the person upon whom it is fixed. The moment the gaze is detected, the eyes are lifted, and glance off with an expression equally doubtful and aggravating. Yet Ethelinda Kane's face is one that might have been almost beautiful, had a fortunate life and a glad heart ever shone through it. Poverty, disappointment, chagrin, love, hate, and malice have lined it and made it what it is. In spite of gray, gleaming eyes is it ugly? Not quite. 'Tis a face of which nine persons in ten would say, "I am afraid of it." The tenth would be its counterpart.

Meanwhile, in a smoothly-gliding car move on the youthful pair who have caused so much comment and anguish.

"A boy and girl," one would say at first glance; yet another shows that they are by no means children. His yellow hair and fair skin make the man look younger, but he is twenty-five. The girl's face, so much darker, looks twenty, yet she is but eighteen. The absolute contrast of their faces, without a trace of family resemblance, proves them to be not brother and sister. Yet nothing in dress or manner, not even that nameless self-consciousness which marks most newly-wedded pairs on their wedding journey, proclaims them

to be bride and bridegroom. They have known each other from childhood, are as accustomed to each other's presence as brother and sister could be, so that in their laughing and chatting they give no hint of their new relation. But as they are very young, evidently very confidential, and travelling alone together, you conclude they must be married, if they do not look so.

Your next mental remark is that the husband is so much handsomer than the wife you cannot see why he fancied her, much less married her ; you for the moment ignoring every possible attraction beside that of a face.

It is true the young man owes you nothing, when you say that he looks like the Greek Apollo, for he bears a splendor of life which that straight-nosed young gentleman in marble never had. Yet his undeniably is the Greek type of beauty, and the Greek temperament, æsthetic, acute, subtle, fickle, and dangerous. You would say this if you saw him and learned him in the by-play of life. At present you say nothing of the sort. You simply see and acknowledge his superb beauty. Above the height, and bearing a broader girth of chest and shoulders than belongs to average men, he carries his head like a god. Its mass of yellow curls clings close to it, and low down the high and broad forehead. His eyes are of that electric blue-gray which transmits every shade of feeling, his skin of the same quality, white to pallor one moment, the next suffused with ruddy blood, the ebb and flow of whose rising and receding tides is vividly visible beneath its transparent surface. These mark at once the powerful passions and mercurial temperament of the

man. His features are bold and keenly cut, especially the nose and chin. The mouth is the only feature which fails to minister to the perfection of the face. Even this is not faulty in outline; indeed it is fine, with its even and well-set teeth. It is something that its expression lacks, or suggests, you scarcely know which, that makes it unsatisfactory. It is surely wavering, and might be taunting, cruel. There lurks in its expression something of the quality so positively defined in the lips of Linda Kane.

Beside him nestles a perfect wren of a maiden. Art and nature have covered her with soft browns, and in a crowd she would be no more noticed among women than her bird-counterpart in a field of stubble. Her travelling-suit is brown, her hair is brown, her eyes are brown, her skin is brown, and lacks coloring. Her face many call plain; a few call it beautiful. The many wonder that anybody can see any beauty in it; the few exclaim because people will call it plain. Nevertheless, in repose, plain it is. Its only chance of beauty is in its capacity for illumination. Her face is a transparency which needs the inward light to bring out its finest possibility. Then the eyes of limpid hazel kindle and dilate; the full, delicate lips quiver with sensibility; the brown cheek glows with a flush of damask. And then, with her soul in her face, Agnes Darcy is beautiful.

Agnes is not looking her best at this moment. Cyril King has just mentally remarked this fact to himself. Cyril is in love, but he could never be so much in love with any woman as not to be perfectly conscious of her looks to their finest shade. Agnes cried in church,

not aloud of course, but the tears did flow with decided effusion while she was saying good-by to her friends. The heroines of novels always look lovely through their tears; Agnes, an actual woman, does not look likewise. Weeping, though ever so little, deepens the rings under her eyes, and leaves a tinge of red about her nose, neither of which is a beautifier.

Cyril notes this fact and is sorry that Agnes cried. He loves Agnes because she is Agnes, but Agnes at her best has more attraction for him and power over him than Agnes with her nose red. He wants her always to look as she did that night at the garden gate in Ulm, when for the first time in his life he was conscious that he loved her better than anything on earth, and told her so, and asked her to be his wife. He had not the slightest intention of doing so five minutes before, although he knew that she was dear to him. But as the liquid hazel eyes looked up to his in the clear moonlight, there was that in them — was it womanhood? was it worship? — which made him feel as if he must snatch her to his heart and hold her there forever. For the first time in his life he saw before him his wife, and told her so. That was more than a year ago, and now they are actually married.

All comes back to him with the surge of blood which tinges his face like a sea-shell — all: the atmosphere of the June night, rose-laden; the look on Agnes' face; the thrill and rush of joy through his own heart. He sees, feels all, and, turning, seeks the face of Agnes, expecting that it will give back in reciprocal glance all that he this moment feels.

But no. Agnes, with head drooped, is gazing out of

the window with a far look in her eyes, as if she had never belonged to him, and with the marks, those ugly marks, of tears upon her face. They had been chatting and laughing till a moment before, and with her face all aglow with light and love for him, he had not noticed these tear-traces. He sees them first on her abstracted face in the same instant in which he is conscious of her lack of reciprocity with his own mood, and instantly his mercurial nature feels a keen rebound. Many a man, certainly a man of his temperament, suffers reaction from happiness in the first consciousness of actual marriage. No matter how ardently or persistently he sought his prize, when it is his, when he suddenly realizes that his sweet occupation of wooer is gone, his wooing done, when he sees by his side a perhaps not too happy woman in the strangeness of her wedding clothes and her wedding journey, and realizes that she, and she only, is to be his till "death do them part," he does not know whether he is happy or not; on the whole he thinks he is not. And she? No matter how she loves him, she is sure she is not. They may emerge into a state of bliss, they probably will; but it lies beyond the newness, the strangeness, the partial assimilations of their wedding journey.

Agnes, gazing out of the car window, is wondering why she cried in the church. Certainly it was for no special cause. Mrs. Stone said truly; she had been a drudge in her aunt's house, and though she was not without affection for the home which had been hers from early childhood, she believed that she was going to a far happier one—to her own, and Cyril's! Cyril'

"How could she cry when she had just been married to Cyril, the dearest being, the beginning and end of life to her! She worshipped him, and yet she cried! It was because she was nervous, because she realized that she was leaving everything else that she held dear for him."

"Could she ever love another spot like Ulm—its girdling hills, its threadlike river, the maple-trees on Deerfield Street, the graveyard on Oakhill where her father and mother were buried? Never!" And again the tears started. She brushed them away instantly, and turned her head farther toward the window, that Cyril might not see them, or their signs. Cyril was sinking deep into the dumps, when she suddenly turned toward him a face radiant with anticipation: "Would he describe just once more the cottage at Westchester? Were there really maples there? Was there room for a garden? Could she see the Sound? She was afraid of the Sound, afraid to go upon it, but would like so much to see it beyond green meadows and maples." Nothing save Agnes is so dear to Cyril's heart as the nest that he has made for her. Happy? He is sure he is, as he begins that descriptive story again for at least the thousandth time. He is perfectly certain that he is happy now, though he had severe doubts of it but a moment since. More, he stays happy till the end of his wedding journey.

Could a man have such tears of anguish shed for him and know that he had caused them, and still be nappy?

Cyril King certainly could.

To be sure, he had no idea of the depth of bitter sorrow which Ethelinda Kane was that moment enduring for him. But she had not left him in ignorance of her wounded and agonized passion. As he could not help it, now, he resolved to put it out of his thought entirely — and he did. As for being made miserable on his marriage day by Linda he resolved that he would not be, and told her so plainly enough — so plainly, indeed, that Mrs. Kating, the washerwoman, was left in no doubt on the subject, as she further proclaimed with her own interpretations.

Ethelinda Kane and Cyril King were first cousins, and until his departure from Ulm had grown up together as brother and sister. His mother died when he was a baby, and even then the little orphan girl of five held him in her arms and nursed him.

Tim King, Cyril's father, was a ne'er-do-well, as geniuses of a certain order are very likely to be. He was a blacksmith by trade, a great, brawny, handsome creature, so quick and handy he might have made a competency at his trade had he so willed, but he willed nothing of the kind. He had a gift for improvisation, a talent for public speaking, a ready and even brilliant wit, which combined at last to work his ruin. With education and proper direction his talents might have wrought a different result; as it was, they only made him a vagabond "spouter" and spendthrift. He was a local politician, and no political ward meeting was considered a success unless Tim King vivified it with his songs and witty off-hand speeches. Convivial by temperament, he began life as a social drinker. Sad stories were told of his young wife's sufferings through

his neglect and hard usage while indulging in "sprees." Her early death was followed by compunction and remorse on his part; for his impulses were kind, and he could be neglectful or cruel only through weakness of will and a constitutional love of pleasure. In his contrition he signed the total abstinence pledge and became an ardent and eloquent temperance lecturer. Yet he died a drunkard, without money to pay for his coffin.

It is hard to say what would have become of Cyril King, during his otherwise uncared-for childhood, if it had not been for his little cousin and foster-sister Linda. In all likelihood he would have died of neglect; as it was, she stood between him and every want. If Tim brought home food, she cooked it for his child; if not, she went out and begged it of the neighbors.

"Cyril was hungry," she said, "and he must have something to eat." "Please, if they would give her some food for him she would come back and wash the dishes, scour the knives, run on errands, do any work to pay for it, — but Cyril *must* have something to eat." As he grew older, everybody felt kindly toward the bright, handsome, motherless boy. And no one more so than Agnes Darcy, who became his patron saint from the first day that he entered a select school and the rich boys laughed at his clothes because they had been patched by Linda's little deft fingers, and at his shoes because they needed patching.

"For shame!" cried Agnes, her eyes flaming up like lamps.

"Oh, shame on you, to laugh at any one for his clothes! You didn't pay for your own."

And the purple and fine linen clad sons of Ulm shrank away ignominiously, because they felt that they had been shamed by a girl, and knew that they deserved shaming.

As for Cyril, he did not know whether she was a little girl, or an angel. To him she seemed something finer than either ; for the looks of the angels in his Sunday-school books did not please him. She was as good to him as Linda, and so much rarer and prettier. At least Cyril thought so.

Tim King was a most fitful and uncertain father ; sometimes loading his child with more than he needed, again, leaving him to suffer. The only thing concerning him in which he remained steadfast was his purpose to allow him " to take an education," for Tim had no means of giving him one. Nevertheless he strongly desired that his son should enjoy and make the most of the scholastic advantages which in an earlier day had been denied to himself. Ulm was famous for its schools. And at fifteen years of age, the most famous scholar in its free academy, was Cyril King. Quick, persevering, and ambitious, he was a natural scholar, and both in the exact sciences and in the classics soon outstripped the boys who once laughed at his patches, and still doted on their clothes.

Ulm was never without its one " remarkable young man," who in a way was considered the ward of the city, — the great man of its coming generation. Of all its favorites, no one had ever been at the same time quite so much of a pet and a wonder, as Cyril King. His painful antecedents, his remarkable beauty and positive talents, fixed upon him the affections of many

and the attention of all. At the death of his poor father, a few of the rich men of the city came spontaneously to his assistance. Afterwards graduated from a university with many honors, he entered at once the law office of the leading lawyer of Ulm. Later, when this lawyer went to the metropolis to join a famous firm, Cyril King went with him, and on the completion of his studies was admitted as a junior partner. Thus at twenty-five, though with fame and fortune still to make, not one young man in ten thousand, born to the most fortunate conditions, had his path to the future so smoothed and made ready for his feet.

He was just beginning to taste the first intoxicating vintage of success — admiration and flattery. But to that hour his heart had never swerved in its allegiance to the little girl who had been brave enough to be his friend when he had no other — save another girl, poorer and more unfortunate than himself. The lines of social caste were very keenly drawn in Ulm. To the hour of his leaving it, he had never been allowed to forget his own unfortunate beginnings. Everybody brought it back in some way, by look or tone or word, except Agnes Darcy. She never did. At one or two points their lots seemed to meet. She was an orphan like himself, and a drudge in her aunt's house. In fact, she did much of the work of a servant, yet nominally she was "a daughter." Family credit saw to it that her street and church and party attire should be beyond reproach. She was included in all family fêtes and invitations, and the fact was never forgotten that she was the only child of John Darcy, Ulm's "remarkable

young man" of the generation before, still deified as at once the most gifted and spiritual of all Ulm's "favorite sons." Ulm, holding still in mournful memory its grief over his early death, looked with tender eyes upon his child. By birthright she belonged to its "first families," a fact which the soft-voiced old gentlewomen who guarded the escutcheons of the town never allowed her to forget. Cyril King knew this. He knew, also, that in this the dazzling dawn of his prosperity, Agnes alone met him with not a shade more of deference than she did when his clothes were seedy, and he, the poor boy of the free academy, had his fortune all to make. Agnes, in the kindness of her heart, went once to see Ethelinda Kane, but was met with such coldness and hauteur that she never ventured to go again. Poor Linda! she hated Agnes from the hour when Cyril, just home from the select school, told her how the boys had laughed, and how Agnes shamed them. She hated the boys—but she hated Agnes also! How dared any girl defend Cyril but herself!

This hatred, born almost in her childhood, grew with her years, and deepened with her nature into womanhood. Linda, a little more than five years his senior, was both mother and sister to Cyril until he left Ulm. He had never studied her character or her feelings in themselves. All he realized was that she lived, moved, and had her being in himself. For him she had endured ignorance, poverty, want, slights, and insults, without a murmur. She had begged food for him when a child, and the scanty earnings of her needle had paid the funeral expenses of his father, more

for the very grave in which he rested. That Linda should love him seemed as natural and proper a thing to Cyril, as if she had been born his sister.

That she had grown to love him with a more absorbing and exclusive passion never dawned upon his consciousness till he discovered it on one of his visits to Ulm, at least two years before his marriage. He was walking with Agnes Darcy under the maples of Deerfield Street late one September afternoon, when Linda inadvertently came upon them from a cross street. She looked at them with a stony stare, but vouchsafed no response either to Cyril's salutation or Agnes' smile, as she passed on. When he sought an explanation, she turned upon him with a fury of hate and love which left further ignorance of the condition of her heart impossible.

Then began Cyril's weakness and sin so far as Linda was concerned. "I could never encounter such a scene again, never, with Linda," he said. It was so much easier to soothe her, to deceive her even, than to listen to her, or to "fight" her.

"Why do you hate Agnes Darcy?" he asked mildly. "Agnes is my friend, and no more. She has been kinder to me than any one in the world, but you, Linda. You would not see me ungrateful, would you? As for love, I love no one on earth as I love you."

From that moment he ceased to be only her brother. If less than lover, he was more than friend. During his absence Linda, no less than Agnes, lived not only on his tender letters but on the tenderer memories of nameless looks, tones, and words whose subtlest mean-

ing finds no interpretation in speech. Cyril silenced his conscience by telling himself that he did it for Linda's peace. His heart was true to Agnes ; he loved her only — he was sure of it now ; but he owed more to Linda than to any being on earth, and could not make her miserable.

No less the end long averted came at last. Irrevocably committed to Agnes, bound to her by sacred vows, the day for their marriage fixed, — to withhold the truth longer from Linda was impossible.

He told her in the little summer-house in the old garden, outside of the shell of a house whose very walls he was sure had ears. "No one could hear him here." No one did, except Mrs. Kating.

After Linda's first tempest had expended itself, Cyril said, —

"I did it for your good, Linda, to save you pain. I feel so tenderly toward you, I never grieve you if I can help it. This is why I have not told you sooner. My love for you has not changed. But we are first cousins. To marry is impossible, as I think. Yet I am just beginning life ; I want my own home."

"Couldn't I have made you a home? I always did till you found a better one. I could have made you a home without marriage!"

"That might do for you, Linda, but not for me. Yet my home shall be yours whenever you wish it. I can never have anything that I will not gladly share with you."

"Even your wife! Even your — wife! I hate her. I will kill her, and then kill myself. I should rejoice to die, if I could first know that she was dead — dead, and that I had killed her"

“Why not kill me?” and a mocking tone lurked in his voice.

“Kill you? I wish I could,—I wish you were dead,—yes, dead. I could be happy shutting the coffin on your face, sure, sure, that if dead to me, you were dead to her for all time. In eternity you will be mine. I will have you.”

Cyril did not smile at the prospect.

In the silence she stole a furtive look at his face—the beloved face. Jealousy, hate, love, all struggled in hers for mastery as she gazed. Love prevailed.

“Oh, Cyril!” she moaned, “I will not do anything,—not anything dreadful. I will not hurt her. She may live. Only you will love me a little,—a little,—and let me see you sometimes!”

CHAPTER II.

THE HOME.

A PRETTY nest. Many strangers and travellers passing by its gate exclaimed, "A poet's home!" "Such a place as this is enough to make one believe in love in a cottage!"

It was only an unpretending two-story wooden house painted fawn-color, with a wide piazza running entirely around it, into which opened like doors many lace-draped windows. It made no attempt, with "gingerbread work" and Mansard roof, to look like a villa. What gave it its unusually attractive aspect outwardly was the wealth of bloom and fragrance in which it was embedded. The Virginia creeper and clematis, the ivy and woodbine, ran with both dark and delicate tracery along its walls. Baskets filled with luxuriant plants swung from its piazza. Vases laden with bloom stood upon its lawn. On one side stretched away a flower-garden, in the centre of which a fountain plashed. On the other a grapery spread out its luscious clusters, to grow ruddy in the sun. The charm of the place was that it invited you. The great, broad hall running straight through the middle of the house, its front outlook facing the gentle hills and wooded slopes of Connecticut, its back the gleaming frontlet of the Sound, invited you. The wicker chairs

on the piazza, the rustic seats under the trees, the hammock swinging from the great elm on the lawn, all seemed to say, "Come, tired soul, come in and rest."

The tones of a voice which often floated through the open windows in the summer twilights seemed laden with the same tender assonance. How often the summer wayfarer paused to listen to those delicious strains, and sighed as he passed on and left them behind. It was Agnes playing and singing to her husband. She had not a powerful voice, and knew nothing of French or Italian music, but she sang songs and ballads with a sweetness of pathos and power that any prima donna might envy. She was preëminently a home-singer, — one of the few women in whom music lives as an inspiration, only to pour its fulness of melody out upon the loved ones at her own hearth. That was a wonderfully happy face worn by the man stretched back in his easy-chair, listening beside her. That was a marvellously happy face worn by the man swinging in the hammock in the late summer afternoons. It was Cyril King, who, hastening from his city office at the earliest possible moment, seemed to bask with the bliss of a child in the delights of his new home. These were perfect moments to him. So perfect in their quality of pure happiness that they were never afterwards repeated. He lived in his sensations. And his sensations at present were as new as they were delightful. The ministry of sunshine of color, of odor, and of sound, —

"The subtle secrets of the air,
Making the things that are not, fair,"

the Greek's passion for the beautiful, no one of these was unknown to him. To have each minister to his senses on his own domain was indeed an almost overwhelming experience. All his life he had longed for it. How deeply only they can tell who have been knocked about through an almost homeless, and wholly comfortless childhood. Ulm was peculiarly a city of homes — of homes prosperous and æsthetic. How often in his forlorn and ragged boyhood Cyril King had paced the length of Deerfield Street, and Mohawk Avenue, peering through the fences at the beautiful gardens within, and from amid many mansions choosing "his house"! It was ever a stately one. It was ever the antipodes of the "cabined and confined" "story and a half" in which Tim King rented the boxy rooms which Linda "kept." The first longing of Cyril King's life had been for a home. He saw it in his visions long before he dreamed of his wife, or had ever looked upon her face. Both were his now. As he gazed back upon his past, it seemed too much to believe. He did not shrink from looking back. Swinging here in his hammock he liked to gaze upon that past, and to compare it with this blissful now. But twenty-five, and he had a wife and home already. His was a prosperous present, with the promise of a still more prosperous future. How many struggled past their prime before gaining half his fruition! At this climax Cyril King would shut his eyes and smile in sheer content; then open them to drink in once more the ever-changing, ever-renewed beauty of the scene surrounding him. It was his, this fair domain stretching from the grassy, tree-shaded country street

down to the blue waters of the Sound ; his, the drunkard's barefooted boy of Ulm ! To be sure it was not wholly paid for, but that did not matter ; with his present income he would pay for it as easily as he could a moderate rent. Lotusmere was but one of the many trumps which had slipped so readily into his hands. An old homestead, by way of business it had come into the possession of his senior partner, who, having no special use or care for it, had sold it to Cyril on the most indulgent terms. If it was so much to Cyril, what was it not to Agnes ? Her home instinct amounted to genius. Had she been born in a garret, a cellar, or a hovel, she would out of either have made a home ; she would have touched it with some grace of beauty which no other garret, cellar, or hovel had. What wonder then that these old trees and shrubs, vines and flowers, which other hands had planted, loved, and left to strangers, should wake to a fresh, luxuriant life and fragrance, as if in loving gratitude for her tender care ? Plants, like children, yield their perfect sweetness only to the hand that loves them. There is a soul in nature which responds perfectly only to the ministry of love, yielding to that a fulness of beauty, and a soul of perfume which the most careful care, without such sympathy, never brings out. It is scarcely a curious fact then, that with all their pains some persons are never successful in the rearing of plants, while others seem to bring an unwonted bloom into every growing thing to which their hands minister. This was true of Agnes ; in her circle at Ulm she was famous as a plant-grower. She made every room in the house where she lived a conservatory. Her friends

sent her their most delicate cuttings to plant and nurse for them. And it was an axiom in Ulm that "anything that would not root for Agnes Darcy was beyond rooting."

She came to her new home in September, and such was the enriching of soil, the trimming of trees and vines, the planting and fostering of flowers, under her eyes and hands, that by the next June Lotusmere had burst into a carnival of bloom, which made it the marvel and delight not only of the stranger who passed its gates, but of the oldest denizens of Lotusport, who had so often sighed in days past that the old place had been left to go down.

Agnes was a child of the inland. Her earliest memories were of the forest-covered hills, girdling the rural city of her birth. Till now, she had never seen any body of water broader than the narrow river Mo, which wound its shining thread in and out through the valley in which she was born. Yet something within her responded at once to the call of great waves. She knew it not, but there was in her a capacity for moods which met and answered the ever-changing voices of the ocean. The Sound was to her a sea. From the moment that she beheld it smiling upon her from beyond the grassy border of her new home, she made it her friend; how much her friend she never knew till, far beyond its call, in the lonely years afterwards, she heard it in her dreams as distinctly as when it first fell upon her delighted ears. Through all that mysterious summer, as she stood half dazed in the dawn of a new life, the great tidal heart of the Sound beat near to her own. Through the dream-

ing hours in which she waited for Cyril, the Sound, above all others, was her chosen companion. Nobody minded her ; nobody ever is particularly minded in a surburban village which draws all its vitality from the life of a near metropolis. There is no loneliness like that which may fall upon you in such a place. The great city feeds you from a thousand sources ; it sharpens your faculties, quickens your ambition, drains your sympathies, and gives you your "set." The parasitic hamlet leaves you to nature, and to yourself. The men of Lotusport used its haven solely to sleep in, to snatch at food in, in time for boat or cars, and as a quiet spot in which they might pay spasmodic visits to their families. Their business was in town, their mansions in town, their treasures were in town at least two thirds of the year, and there, in preponderating proportion, were their hearts also. The ladies of Lotusport, most of them, "wintered" in town, they shopped in town, their "society" was from town, and they wished it distinctly understood that while they "summered" in Lotusport, they themselves still belonged to town, and therefore had little time and less inclination to cultivate their indigenous neighbors. Yet even Lotusport possessed its natives, who dwelt by birthright on its ancient homesteads. It also claimed numerous cottagers of "limited means," whose masculine heads did business in the city, while they dwelt the year round in unostentatious peace in snug cottages beside the Sound. They preferred the everlasting sighing of its waves, and the deep silence of the long Lotusport street to a French flat at a thousand dollars a month, beefsteak at fifty cents a pound, and pinching and precarious "style" in the city.

To the latter class belonged Cyril and Agnes. Hither they had come to make a home, and at this time had no thought or wish ever to dwell in the great city. Lotusport society paid its dues to Agnes; the clergyman, the doctor, the leading merchant, the local "judge," and their families, with an honest acknowledgment of the "proper thing," made personal calls on the interesting young couple who had come to begin life in Lotusport. Agnes had duly been pronounced "plain, decidedly," by the ladies, "interesting," by the gentlemen, and Cyril "remarkable," and "splendid," by all. Agnes faithfully returned her calls, but when the last one was paid, felt almost as much a stranger as before she began. Her nature did not take root readily, but when it did, it could not be torn from anything to which it clung, without tearing her life with it. In Ulm she had known all her friends from babyhood; who could ever be so dear as the beloved Ulmites? Nobody. She was sure of that. Could any town ever seem like home while she remembered Ulm? Never. That was a fact above question. But not so with Lotusmere, Cyril's home, the home that he had made for her, and given her. From the moment that she crossed its threshold, looked on its vines and shrubs, listened to the welcome of the waves running to meet her on its grassy border, it seemed to her that it had been her home always, and that her home it must forever be. Thus it came to pass that her whole life was lived within its gates. To complete her household tasks, to practice her music, to sketch, to tend her flowers, all in time to take her seat on the little pier running out from the lawn, before Cyril sailed by

In the afternoon boat from the city, homeward bound, these were the Alpha and Omega of her happy days. Her whole life seemed to her not a dream, but the realization of a dream of love and peace, which to one of her temperament amounted at times to an exaltation of ecstasy. She was a neophyte in mind and in years, this girl-woman of eighteen.

She thought that it was nothing but her love for Cyril that made her so happy. While she waited for him, she had no consciousness of how her soul fed on color, and sight, and sound. She had not the remotest idea that she had an artist's soul, much less creative faculty. But she did know that she was never weary of gazing outward where the Sound, vast and free, sped to mid-ocean. She was never weary of watching the fog creep above the waves, till under the sun's keen lances it splintered into a myriad shreds of silver that broke and curled and flew away to fold the low-lying hills in nebulous film. The vast expanse before her alive with action, voice, and outline, filled her with delight. The very motion which she beheld, clear, swift, and silent, was full of repose. How different from the tramp and turmoil in thoroughfares of men upon the land! The long swoop of the sea-birds, the oar-like wings of the white sea-gulls cutting the blue air as they swept on slow and low above the waves, — her eyes seemed to follow them always. Then there were the fishing boats with men dropping lines and nets over their dipping sides, out in deep water; the stately steamers moving on to unknown ports; the distant rush of waves through their mighty wheels; the splash of oars near by, bearing on the green and scarlet pleas

ure skiffs with their sweetheart-names; yachts more graceful than the white-winged gulls; the gleam of mackerel showing their shining sides through translucent sapphire; the jelly-fish's opaline jewels trembling and gleaming in the still waters above which her head bent, as she leaned out from the canopy which covered her little pier. All these filled her vision and made a part of the new, enchanting revelation of life upon the waves.

In the summer evenings two happy lovers might have been seen in the wake of the sunset, floating in a sail-boat out upon the Sound, or sitting on their piazza till twilight deepened into night, watching the jewelled steamers flash through the darkness, or the white-winged schooners fly by like phantoms upon the sea; the while talking over and over their love and their dreams for the future. In those days the thought had never entered Agnes' mind that life, her life, could ever take on any meaning save that of happiness. In a general way she remembered the uncertainty of all mortal joys; she knew that sickness and death and misfortune might come to her as they do to many; but that even a shadow could ever fall upon the perfect sunlight of her wedded love—could such a thought have come to her, she would have answered, "Impossible!" Whatever else happened, Cyril and she were to live in and for each other, and for each other only, down to the grave, and in death they would not be divided. She had thought even of that; how, when all this beautiful life had vanished, they would lie together, their mortal parts, in one grave, while they, immortal, would still live and love together forever and ever, far beyond.

That Cyril could ever love her any less was a possibility to her unborn. Had it come to her, she would have denied it as utterly as the possibility of his ever becoming less dear to her. Cyril! Was he not her husband!

This fact, in her mind, covered the world of desire, of love, of every human ambition. She believed that it did equally in him. He had loved her from a little girl. How often he had told her that all his aspiration and toil, all his present and future, **were hers, and hers alone!**

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE CYRIL.

How beautifully babies are born in books! Little Arthur and Ethel glide gracefully upon the human scene, not incommoding their pretty mamma by so much as a wrinkle. Not thus are the actual Jackeys and Janeys born. We try to play with it, to poetize it; nevertheless it remains, to strike terror soon or late to almost every woman's heart, the most awful fact of existence save that of death, the fact of human birth. One must wonder sometimes how an omnipotent God can stay placidly in heaven and listen to the cries of the daughters of earth, at such cost of foreboding and fear, of weariness and anguish, is every child of woman born.

Little Cyril was a poem till he came, but he ceased to be one to his father from the moment that he uttered his first scream. Cyril King had his "mystic summer" such as that of which a poet father sings. It was enchanting to talk of the coming child, holding the hand of its mother in the twilight and the starlight, with the fragrance of the garden pervading their senses, and the great Sound sweeping before them like a phantom sea. But from the moment that he appeared, little Cyril himself seemed to shut everything romantic and ideal out of sight

I am aware that this is dreadful heresy to utter about a first baby. But it is the first baby that is the disorganizer. Eleven afterwards will not make such a revolution in a home as the one who came first. Many a father and mother who have lived to find the very life of their life in their first-born child, look back with a sickening memory to the first year of his existence. Often in that year the child is a barrier instead of a bond between two who were happy lovers until he came. The young mother, especially if she be motherless herself, and her baby sickly, lives in constant terror lest the flickering life which she holds so closely yet so tremulously to her own will go out. She loves her baby, oh, how utterly! yet ten chances to one she does not know how to take care of it, or in any emergency what to do with it or for it. Every mother of many children, every maiden aunt who visits it to see what it is like, to determine whether it has its father's nose, its mother's eyes, or whether it bears a legible resemblance perhaps to some detested grandparent—every one has her own unfailing remedy for baby's phthisic, colic, croup, teeth, and "worms," till with the administration of all by its distracted mother, the wonder is that baby manages to live at all. How much of anguish and effort it costs, just to live in this world! And in all the brief story there is nothing so piteous as the feeble struggle of human infancy for life.

After the manner of most first babies little Cyril screamed away the first six months of his existence. The first baby is almost always a nervous child. All the qualms and fears and terrors which its girl mother weeps through in its prenatal life are repeated and per

petuated in her child. Little Cyril seemed to be not only in pain but in actual fright at the new world in which he found himself. According to the tenets of ideality and poetry he should have been a large, fair, serene-eyed child, born out of musing hours and moonlit rambles. In reality he was most acutely organized, as the first children of very young and sensitive mothers are sure to be. He was over-shrinking, timid, and tearful from his birth. A long-tried nurse would have declared him emphatically "a most uncomfortable child."

He was most beautiful to Agnes; nevertheless, at least half of the time she did not know what to do for him. She had never had the care of children. Instinctively they belonged to her, and she to them, but she could only learn to minister wisely to their minute needs, by the actual process of experience like that of her life long nursing of her plants. Long before she could hold him in her arms, her large, ever-asking eyes would follow the nurse hour by hour, just to see and to learn what she did for baby. But when she actually began to minister to him herself, her fear lest she should not do it well gave little Cyril himself a feeling that he was in insecure hands, and he accordingly screamed louder than ever.

Nothing could exceed the tenderness of little Cyril's father for the first weeks of the child's tiny life. His summer vacation, deferred till autumn, Cyril spent in the sick-room of Agnes. In time it was his strong arms which carried her up and down stairs, and which placed her in the invalid's chair in sight of the waves that she loved. He read to her by the hour from their favorite books, while little Cyril slept, or was lulled to peace

in the cradle-like arms of his deep-bosomed nurse. Never before had Agnes had Cyril so unreservedly to herself. Never had he seemed so gentle, so infinitely dear. What a recompense were he and his love for all suffering! Agnes came back to life pale, wan, and weak as very young mothers are apt to do, yet feeling that she had just lived through the happiest, the most perfectly blissful month of all her life.

Then the world of work called Cyril back. When he began to come again daily from his office, then he realized for the first time that the month which he had just spent at home bridged the old life and the new. The first evening of his returning, while entering his own gate it struck him aghast, for the first time, that the old life, that life in itself so sweet and brief and precious, was gone forever. And as a sudden baby shriek struck his ear from within, he was equally conscious that the new life disappointed and irritated him. No soft-eyed, delicate girl in a garden hat awaited him at the gate, or ran eagerly down the village street to meet him under the elms. No delicious notes of welcome floated to him from the still open windows on the bland October day, as he hastened up the garden walk. Already they were of the past. He could have borne that baby shriek which reached him down the street, had it not foretold so much more. Of course Agnes was with her baby, and with her baby she would stay. She wanted to be with Cyril, but baby did not like his new nurse and would cry, and if baby would cry Agnes must be with him, even if she could not do him an atom of good.

As time went on, if by rare chance Agnes was able to come down to greet Cyril as of old, they could scarcely

meet before baby would set up his sudden, piercing wail ; for the hour of his father's return little Cyril seemed assiduously to devote to his evening colic.

No matter what absorbing theme Cyril had struck upon, Agnes would cry instantly, —

“ Oh my baby ! Cyril, come to baby ! We will talk by and by.”

In a moment more, unless he followed after, Cyril found himself alone, to remain in that melancholy state for an indefinite length of time. If he went after Agnes he felt called upon to assist her in wooing back peace, to carry baby, to pat him on the back, and to fulfil as far as possible the duties of a subordinate nurse. It gradually but surely dawned upon him that the son and heir which he had so desired was a minute yet mighty tyrant, who ruled the house and managed to make its inmates decidedly uncomfortable if not unhappy, for at least two thirds of the time. If he had gained a son, it was at the cost of his daily sweet companion, his lover, his wife, his never-failing minister. Not that Agnes loved Cyril less. She loved him more, if possible. But she was young, weak, and ignorant, and her motherhood overpowered her. She was possessed by her new relation. She was absorbed by her child to such a degree that she seemed to have nothing of life left for herself, her husband, or any thought or thing else. This absorption was so utter, she had never realized how little she had remaining for Cyril. She did not know that her being, physical, mental, and spiritual, was drained by her child. She had no life but in baby. In her, all thought and emotion centred 'n the moaning little creature in her lap. Cyril lived

in a world unknown to her. She did not comprehend this world very well, even when she had nothing to do but to listen to the stories which he told her about it in the evening hours, — the great, rushing world of business, and affairs of rivalry, ambition, and hot pursuit. She used to like to have Cyril tell of it, because it was the great world in which he lived and had his being through all the long hours which he spent apart from her. But they were more distant and misty myths than ever to her now, Wall Street and Broadway, and certain grand houses on Murray Hill and Park Avenue. She had seen them all, but even when she looked upon them they seemed remote and foreign to her. She cared nought for anything in New York but Central Park, and even the Mall, in her eyes, could not vie in soaring grace and cool, green shadow with the maple-lined streets of old Ulm. Now, every evening the husband and wife came together from out of two distant and conflicting worlds. So far as each was possessed by either, he or she was a stranger to the other. Cyril suddenly found that he had lost his audience. Home and baby consumed all power of interest in Agnes. And without being conscious of it, she expected Cyril's attention to be as concentrated and as microscopic as her own. She did not feel the least interested in the great trampling world of men in which Cyril had been striving all day for himself, for her, and for baby. Often when he was telling her of some incident in his day he had the mortification to see that she did not even hear him, and immediately felt proportionally injured. And this was Agnes, who for more than twelve perfect months had been second eyes, ears, voice, and soul to him !

Meanwhile, if any wonderfully cunning look of little Cyril was lost on his papa, as it very often was, Agnes also felt silently aggrieved. Cyril loved his wife and his child, but he also loved himself very dearly, and when wife and child from one unfailing source of delight merged into an anxious care, Cyril's thoughts began to revert to his own beloved self as an already lonely and neglected individual. Still it never occurred to him to seek other consolations — not then.

The evil deepened. Little Cyril's first tooth heralded the long-drawn wails and wasting away of little Cyril himself, and days and nights of weary waking and watching for both father and mother. It came at last that Cyril dreaded to enter his own home. The quick step, the light form, the beaming smile, that used to await him with eager welcome upon the stairs, greeted him no more. Instead, in a darkened room he found a woman pale to sickness, with dark rings circling her hollow eyes, so worn by watching and sleeplessness that she started in nervous terror at every sound, as she bent over the pillow in her lap on which lay an infant, whose closed eyes, flickering pulse, and occasional spasmodic motions seemed to presage speedy death.

"Oh, if I only knew what to do for him!" moaned Agnes one evening, as both she and Cyril bent over the pillow on which the wasted infant lay.

Even Cyril, used as he had grown to the sight of it, felt frightened and grief-stricken now, it looked so much as if it were dying. And there was a touch of remorse in his grief; for through it would steal the thought that if little Cyril must die, it were better that he should die now, than linger on, killing his mother and making both so wretched.

"If I only knew the right thing to do!" Agnes went on, the great tears trickling down her wasted face for the first time in weeks. "I never knew how much I could need a mother till now. No one, no one to tell me just what ought to be done. Mrs. Mash says one thing; she is a homœopathist. Mrs. Duché tells me to do another, just the opposite; she is a hydropathist. Mrs. Irritant says if I do either it will be sure death; I must do as she says, and she is an allopathist. I try to forget them all, and to do just what doctor tells me. But look at baby, Cyril! He is dying! I know he is. What can I do!"

"Let me send for Linda."

Cyril had made this proposition before, but the shadow which it brought into Agnes' eyes made him drop it at once. She could not explain to herself why she had such a dread of Linda's coming. She thought of her as Cyril's foster-sister, as his only near living relative. She herself was sisterless, and had no mother. More, she not only needed, she was dying for the help of woman, of a woman older, stronger, wiser, than herself. Her nineteen years of life had not made her strong enough to carry the burden that she now bore. Already she was like a half-blown flower blighted before its opening. In all the world Linda seemed to be the only one to come to her help. Linda had no close ties, no one on earth so near to her as Cyril. Now she worked hard with her needle to support herself in the house of strangers. Was it more than right that Cyril should share his comfortable home with one so near, who had done so much for him?

Ever since she had known him, Cyril had told Agnes how much he owed to Linda. Since the birth of little Cyril he had spoken of it often, with the premeditated purpose of softening Agnes' heart toward his cousin to a degree that would make her willing that Linda should come to Lotusmere. Agnes thought everything over. As she rocked little Cyril in her arms she would muse on the woman who, as a little child, nursed his father, and her heart would warm toward Linda, till she thought of her "here."

"Here! in this very room," she would say. "Living in this house, — her home as well as mine! That dreadful look which she gave me under the maples of Ulm!" and Agnes shuddered. "If she were ever to look at me like that here in my own home, how could I bear it! I *could not* bear it!" and Agnes would close her eyes to shut out the very thought of Linda. "It is right and must be done — sometime," she would say to herself with a sigh as she banished her. Nevertheless, whenever Cyril mentioned Linda's coming in the form of an actual proposition, a pang struck through Agnes' heart, and a shadow swept over her eyes which made Cyril silent. That strange, deprecating glance of hers made him feel as if she were conscious of how much he was keeping back from her concerning Linda. He was sure that she knew nothing of it. If that too well remembered look of Linda's could make Agnes shrink from the thought of her like this, how much more acute repulsion would she feel could she know the whole truth. She knew that Linda loved Cyril devotedly, "as a sister." The thought of this love which she bore him was all that

made her endurable to Agnes. Linda was Cyril's sister his only sister! she was trying to compel herself to think of her and to love her as such. In the beginning Cyril thought it a wrong to Linda to explain the nature of her wild and vehement passion for himself. For the same reason he withheld from Agnes the fact that Linda wrote him, constantly, letters filled with passionate terms of endearment, which Agnes would think no woman on earth had a right to address him save herself. That any woman could do so, even one who claimed to be his sister, had never entered into Agnes' upright mind as possible. Cyril knew this, and said, "Why should I make her unhappy, and for no just cause?"

He was used to Linda's letters; had he not received them ever since he was a boy? "He knew just how to take them." Agnes did not, and more, never could learn. He could never teach her single mind to understand them, never; not as he wished them understood, which meant that at a glance she would understand them literally, and altogether too well. "The truth was not always to be spoken; certainly not." Never was there a more utter fallacy.

Acting on this conclusion he took his first step away from his wife, as any man or woman does who makes the most intimate confidences of another life his or her own in secret; hiding that secret from the wedded mate as from one who has neither right nor interest in the matter. The secret in itself may not be wrong, but its influences all run in the wrong direction. The subterfuges, the deceit, the falsehood, almost sure to grow out of it, build up the barrier, and

make the sin and the unhappiness. Cyril did not want Linda's letters, not at first. For one year, at least, they wearied and tormented him. With his continued absence all her old longing just to see his face came back to her. With it malice and pride went under. She asked his forgiveness for all her wicked threats. She was crazed when she uttered them, she said ; she did not mean them. Life was empty, desolate, utterly worthless without him. For his sake she could even love his wife. She did not wish to intrude, but her soul yearned for the sight of his face. She would be a servant in his house, if she could but come where he was, and serve him, and see him once more. For the first year of his marriage, nothing could have been more unacceptable to Cyril than his cousin Ethelinda's presence. His life was complete. Any third person would have been an intruder. Now all seemed changed. He felt as if he would welcome anybody who would divide her care, and help to give him back the society of his Agnes. Besides, he began to be conscious of a quality in Linda's letters which gratified and soothed him. He did not know, himself, how infinitely sweet to his soul were the voice of praise and the word of worship. Here was one who had worshipped him ever since he was born. He had neglected and forgotten her, how often, but she had never forgotten him ! How often he felt alone and neglected now. Here was one longing, praying to love him and to serve him, whose one object in life would be to minister unto him. The more he thought of this, the more it became a personal wish with him that Linda should come. And as soon as he himself wanted Linda, he

was ready to pronounce mentally that Agnes' undisguised aversion to his cousin was unreasonable, if not unkind. "She can afford to be more magnanimous," he said. "It is she who took me from Linda, and made me her own. It was Ethelinda who lost me, and I was all that she had, poor girl. In her heart no one could supplant me,—not even a child," he added bitterly. "Agnes should remember that she took Ethelinda's all, and forgive her if she did give a look of hatred. Even now, could Agnes give a look of love to anybody who could take me from her?"

His own self-pity made him sympathize with Linda. How soon she felt it filtering through his written words. "He was unhappy," she was sure of it. After all he wished her, he needed her! At present this was bliss enough. In every line that she wrote she followed up her advantage to the utmost. He had already reached that place where he and Linda were exchanging weekly letters filled with tenderest sympathy, of which his wife knew nothing, when he made the last proposition to send for Linda to come to their home.

Agnes held in hers the wasted hand of little Cyril. It was scarcely bigger, and as blue as a tiny bird's claw. Could a baby with such shriveled little fingers live! Her silent tears fell upon them, upon the waxen face, and shrunken features, and purple-veined eyelids.

"Baby is past hope, is dying," said her agonized heart. Then the vision came before her of the woman who even as a child nursed and saved this baby's father. Might she not do as much for his child!

"Do send for her!" she suddenly exclaimed; "what if she does hate me! I can love her if she will save him! Send for Linda, Cyril; send at once."

"You have done right at last, Agnes," said Cyril. "Linda will give you back your baby, and she will give you back to me. It is so long since I have seen my Agnes. I love baby's mother, but I want my Agnes."

He stooped and wiped away the dropping tears, and kissed her on her forehead. She shuddered, not at the kiss, but because as she felt it she saw Linda's face filled with the horrible look which made her shudder under the maples of Ulm. She was weak and over-wrought; it was a natural sequence that she should see visions. This fell upon her like the first chill of a slowly gathering storm, like the cold presence of evil yet to come.

CHAPTER IV

THE SERPENT IN EDEN.

"COME to us at once," wrote Cyril to Linda; "our child lies at death's door. No one can give him back to us if you cannot. After all, I cannot live without you, Linda."

This is a portion of the letter which found its way into the bare chamber in which we left Ethelinda Kane nearly two years before. The room had not changed, neither had its inmate. The great basket filled with unfinished garments still stood by the table. No added article of furniture relieved the barren aspect of the room. But an imperial colored photograph of Cyril King, handsomely mounted, hung upon the wall, in splendid contrast to everything upon which it looked down. It hung opposite the bed, where the eyes of its occupant would open first upon it in waking, and opposite the work-chair on which in steadfast gaze it seemed to be ever looking down.

It was a study in human nature to watch the effect of this letter upon Linda as she sat alone, conscious of nothing but its contents, and of herself. She read it, then kissed it, re-read it, and kissed it again. Then she went to the little old box on the bureau, unlocked it, and snatched from it the picture which she so passionately kissed on the day of Cyril's marriage. It

held Cyril's old self, just as he looked when he first went away to college.

"So you can *not* live without me, you darling! I knew that you could not, — not long, — and yet you have, nearly two long years! But no more, no more! If I enter your home I'll never leave it, never. I'll kill her first!" and the old evil look emerged from every feature, darkening the whole face.

"She! miserable little rag! What is there in her, to help and to satisfy you? If you have not found this out already, I will help you to learn the fact. You are having your day, my lady; it will be a brief one, with nearly a whole lifetime to come after. How long, how long it has seemed to me already, sitting here alone, measuring my agony stitch by stitch the year through. And you, so happy then — *then!* Now my turn has come, and he cannot live without me."

She uttered these words slowly, as she twisted a long tress of black hair around her finger. She sat with Cyril's picture open in her hand, lifting her eyes from it only to gaze into the little looking-glass hanging before her.

"How shall I look to him?" she murmured, and as she asked the question a smile stole over her face which at once softened and beautified it; "he always said that I was beautiful to him. If I am, I am utterly indifferent how I may look to any one else. Uncle Tim used to call me 'his pretty little girl.' If I have grown plain, trouble has made me so. Happiness could make me beautiful. I am sure I am anything but plain, this moment," and again she smiled complacently upon the face reflected in the glass. She

spoke the truth ; the face that she saw therein shone out upon her with a certain beauty. The sudden excitement, the reaction from hopelessness caused by the letter, had brought a glow to her pale cheeks, a dilating light into her cold eyes, an illumination to the entire countenance, which kindled its delicate but wasted contours into a fitful charm. Linda believed that it was trouble alone which had stolen from her face its childish attraction. If so, it was trouble unsanctified, the low-brooding storm of passion never inly lulled, envy, jealousy, and malice, which had made it what it was.

Had she been born to wifehood and motherhood, hers would have been a different face. She was one who would have loved her own intensely, passionately, because it was her own. Had she come into possession of woman's common heritage, those drawn lines would have rounded into curves, those hungry and furtive eyes would have shone with serene satisfaction. Now her nature was at issue with fate. She believed that life had defrauded her. This made her look with wrath, sometimes even with hate, upon the more fortunate. She could not divest herself of the idea that in some unlawful way they had come into possession of the joy that belonged to her. Poor heart ! To herself she had never seemed so near to that joy as at this moment, — the joy of being loved, of being needed, — the fullness and sweetness of love's possession. This very seeming brought her nearer to beauty than she had ever been since she was a little child. It is difficult for any woman, even the plainest, to believe herself wholly to be ugly. It is instinctive in every woman, even the

most perverted, the longing to be beautiful. Not since Cyril King went away had Linda gazed upon her own face with any feeling of satisfaction. She did, now; for she had chosen for her personal inspection a rare and most auspicious moment. The glow on her cheeks, the light in her eyes, the illumination of her whole countenance, shone back through her mirror upon her sight, and astonished herself.

"I am handsomer than she is," she exclaimed, in lingering contemplation, still twining the long black tress about her finger.

"To be sure, that is not saying much, for he chose for his wife the plainest-faced girl in Ulm. But if he could see me now, this moment, he would love me; he could not help it, not while I love him so much. He has tried it for nearly two long years, and after all he cannot live without me. Does he not say so?"

After so long an absence, and at such distance from Cyril, it was impossible for Linda to know or to realize how much she exaggerated the feeling that prompted the utterance upon which she dwelt with such fond exultation. She instinctively deepened the meaning of his words with the special intensity of her own emotions.

Cyril King, writing from out the shadows of his life, impatient, restless, tired out, thought only that he could not live without a change in his home, and that nobody would be so likely to bring it about and to give back Agnes to him, as Linda; all, of course, through her love for himself. He was also perfectly certain that she would minister to him with double zest if he made her certain in advance that she was necessary

to him. But he also, coloring his thought with the hue of his own surrounding life, had no idea of the exaggeration with which she would invest his assurance, nor that through it she would hasten on to bitter disappointment.

Ethelinda Kane's thirty years of life had all been spent within a very narrow circle in the provincial city of Ulm. Every one of its old inhabitants had heard of Ethelinda Kane, but very few knew her by personal acquaintance. The pitiful history of her childhood, the keen shame she had felt in her Uncle Tim's disgraced career, the intense sympathy which she had lavished upon Cyril from babyhood to manhood, the poignant consciousness of her own poverty, lack of education, and unnumbered disadvantages,—all together had filled her with a pride as morbid as it was sensitive. It made her shrink from the presence of the fastidious and fortunate, not because she considered herself in any wise their inferior, oh no, but because, believing herself by right of inherent endowment to be their peer, and often more than their peer, she avoided contact for fear that they (remembering her past) might not acknowledge it. She shunned equally the ignorant and the common with whom her daily lot brought her into perpetual intercourse. Neither class understood or liked her. While she, like an alien, stood alone between, detesting both. At times she had made herself necessary in more than one home, yet personally no one could have been less missed than she when she went forth from Ulm. And no one with a more utter sense of loneliness could have struck forth alone into the great unknown world.

"Going for mischief, I warrant!" exclaimed Mrs. Twilight, as, dropping her knitting and peering through the blooming plants on her window ledge, she watched Linda Kane out of sight.

Within twelve hours of the receipt of his letter, Linda was on her way to Cyril, and before the close of twelve more she stood in his home. He went to the railway station to meet her, and with the very first tone of his voice there fell upon Linda the chill of disappointment. He was glad, very glad to see her; he left her in no doubt on that score; but it was in a pre-occupied fashion which seemed to strike from her heart at once the dream of love and triumph which wholly possessed her when she sat before the looking-glass in Ulm.

"After all it was all 'Agnes,' 'Agnes!'" and the baby. His very tone in speaking of them tells me that," she said to herself with bitter chagrin, and in the swift revulsion of emotion she felt the old fury of hate surge up and sweep through her blood. For an instant it seemed to her that it must break forth into the old threats and imprecations with which she filled his ears the day before his marriage. A quick consciousness of the consequences, the memory of her two last, lonely years, with the will that never failed save when overmastered by passion altogether, prevented an outbreak. But the floods of tears and taunts struggling for vent, which she held back, made her silent.

They were walking along the village streets, a few rods of which intervened between the station and his door, when Cyril said, —

"I don't know why, Linda, but I feel sure that you will save little Cyril. You know how your nursing saved *me* once," and with this memory came the first really tender tones into *his* voice.

"I shall do all that I can for him; you know that," answered Linda, the same instant lifting her eyes to the vine-hung walls of Lotusmere, and glancing over its ample and exquisitely cultivated grounds with a new pang as she thought, "And this is his home and *hers*! while I have lived and toiled in a room bare as a garret;" forgetting, in the sight of Cyril's home, that she had proudly refused the many proffers he had made to buy for her the prettiest cottage she could choose in Ulm.

"You will excuse Agnes, I know," said Cyril, offering to take Linda's wrappings in the lower hall. "She asked me to bring you directly to her, where she is holding little Cyril. She does not leave him for a moment — not even for *me*," he added in a tone of injury.

Linda followed him up to the darkened room. Therein she saw, beside a low couch, the slight figure of a woman bowed over an infant which she held upon a pillow in her lap. She knew her at once to be Agnes, although in the dim light she bore not the slightest resemblance to the Agnes whom she carried in her memory. They had never met face to face since the day when Linda shot out her glance of hate under the maples of Ulm. She was not prepared for the change wrought in Agnes. She anticipated manœuvring in her own behalf against many odds. The moment that she glanced at Agnes she was more

certain than ever that the advantages even of person were all in her possession. Had the curtain been lifted, and the cruel daylight let in on both faces, nine persons out of ten would have agreed with her. It was a study, the meeting of these two. Neither was a woman of the world; one was but slightly acquainted with the conventional forms of fine society, the other not at all. Neither knew aught of the diplomacy of daily intercourse as practised in fashionable circles. Experience had come to each within a very narrow arc of observation and of action. Nevertheless, as you saw one gaze on the face of the other, you were sure that by nature they were very unequally matched. At first glance Agnes, who had not lived twenty years, looked as old as Linda. On a second you discovered that she was young; also, that her youth was touched with blight and had taken on the semblance of premature age. It was not age; she looked girlish while she looked old, though all freshness of girlishness had gone. Beauty had never dwelt with her; it had only hovered over her, and glanced from her in subtle, evanescent gleams. Of these the last ray seemed to have gone out. She was thin to emaciation, and her great, brown eyes, which anxious days and sleepless nights had dilated into unusual size, were filled with a wistful, asking gaze, like that of a wounded deer in its mute appeal for final help. To Linda Kane, Agnes King looked but the wreck of Agnes Darcy. This fact imparted to herself a sense of advantage. Looking upon Agnes her face took on an unwonted gentleness of expression, the gentler, certainly, because she knew that at that instant Cyril was looking at her

and she was instinctively sure that it would be greatly for her interest to impress upon him at once that she, Linda, notwithstanding her strong threats of long ago, *now* intended to be extremely kind to Agnes. Yet to discriminating eyes, even in its smiling, it was not a face to trust. Strong mental poise was indicated in the outline of the head, concentration of will in the fixed gaze of the naturally furtive eyes; but the set smile, lengthening the mouth, and drawing its lines earward, was equally forced, and through the low, even tones of the voice still faintly vibrated that quality which could rise to clarion cries of rage or passion. It was velvety now in its softness, sad and low with sympathy; yet listening to it, any unpreoccupied, intuitive person would have instinctively exclaimed, —

“I like you not, though you speak well :
The reason why I cannot tell.”

“You are very kind to come to us,” said Agnes, extending her hand above the head of her child, still with but one thought in her mind. She exclaimed in another instant, “Look at little Cyril! Do you think that he *can* live?”

“I think that he can and will live,” answered Linda, bending down and kissing with unfeigned tenderness the wasted little face, and with but one emotion in her heart: “He is Cyril’s child. He is little Cyril.” To her that instant, Agnes, his mother, had no part or lot in him.

“If he were but mine,” she thought, still holding her face close to his, — “mine, my child, — I could say quits with fate, no matter what else were denied me.”

In her nature the maternal instinct rose to passion

To realize herself childless was to arouse in her all the rebellion of her heart ; and all its hatred, if she beheld that moment the more fortunate. For once, in kissing a child, she forgot its mother. She thought of nothing save that she was kissing Cyril's baby, a poor, wasted, suffering little baby.

It was impossible that an instinct so profound as Linda's passion for children should go for nought, in any woman. Such women are the inevitable nurses of children, even when they themselves are childless. In her poor little world Linda had always been famous as a nurse. Even as a child, her care had saved more than one baby, whose after lot proved her nursing to be a doubtful blessing. In some luxurious home in Ulm, beside the bed of a very sick child, more than once it had been whispered, "Send for Linda Kane. She has a touch, a way, something about her, they say, which will save any child, if it can be saved."

And more than once Linda Kane had gone and nursed back to life a fair child-idol ; and made its parents her grateful friends for life. But her work done, Linda Kane had always retreated to her solitary den, and presumed no more upon their friendship than if she had never crossed the threshold of the home wherein her name was never mentioned, save in gratitude. Nor was she ever known to accept either presents or money for her services ; her superlative pride would not let her.

"If I had not served them, they would not have spoken to me. They shall be under obligations to me : that is pay enough," she would say with a head-toss of supreme scorn ; even if the tears dropped the same in

stant on the coarse garment that her hand was fashioning.

She merely imparted of her own life to a sick child. Her knack of handling it, her very touch, seemed to soothe in a few moments the most irritable, the most afflicted.

From the moment that she lifted, not the pillow, but little Cyril himself, into her arms, both of his parents seemed to feel instinctively that he would live and prosper.

"Teeth!" said Linda, as she sat down, the child in her arms, and her bonnet still on her head. "They hurt you and almost kill you, don't they, baby? But they will soon be through," — feeling the swollen little gums. "Then little Cyril will get well."

This was said in an electric sort of tone, which seemed to be felt even by the child. He opened wide his eyes, with the first conscious look which had been seen in them for days. For weeks he had scarcely opened them at all, without a cry; now something in the new voice seemed to impart unwonted exhilaration to his feeble little pulses, till at last, with a faint smile flickering over his face, he closed his eyes as if in perfect peace.

"Up to your old tricks, Linda?" said Cyril. "Don't you remember how you used to magnetize the poor little children in Post Street, till they would follow you about with their eyes shut? Hereafter, when baby cries, we shall set you to magnetizing him; then we shall always have peace."

"But it would injure baby wouldn't it?" asked Agnes, anxiously.

"Not my magnetism," said Linda, with an air of consequence. "I simply soothe into quiet his aching little nerves, because I love him so much."

"Who could love him more than I? and I have never been able to soothe him at all," said Agnes hopelessly.

"That is because you are not physically strong enough. You are too nearly in little Cyril's own condition. You have not yet regained your ordinary strength," replied Linda compassionately. You have no relay of life in reserve for him now; nor will you have, till you have renewed your own vital forces. How can you give him what you have not? I have not been overtaxed as you have been. I have fresh strength, courage, and love for little Cyril. I can help him at once, and time will cure him."

"How wisely you talk, and what strength and hope you give me," said Agnes gratefully. "Think, Cyril! an hour ago, we felt as if baby could not live another day."

"No more soothing syrup out of an infernal bottle. Linda shall be the soother," said Cyril, in tones of thankfulness.

"Infernal syrup, you should say," said Linda. "It has murdered more innocents, that concoction of paregoric and villainous compounds, than all the croups and scarlet fevers in the land put together."

"Do you think so?" asked Agnes deferentially.

"I know so."

"Why, Mrs. Mère said that I must give it to baby every time he waked and cried; and she has had nine children."

"She hasn't nine alive, I know."

"No, she has only one alive ; but she says that nothing ever quieted the others in their sufferings, but the soothing syrup."

"Yes, it quieted them forever. If you have any left, throw it out of the window," said Linda peremptorily.

"If you say so," said Agnes, still more deferentially, "I'll throw every drop out of the window," and mat-ing her words with action, she took a labelled bottle from the stand, went to the window, opened it, dashed the bottle out ; and in an instant more the brown fluid was trickling in anything but a soothing fashion from the nose of an iron dog, that stood guarding an outside door, and down the backs of the tender infant grasses, struggling for life in the chilly April air, on the lawn of Lotusmere.

"And I have not even taken your bonnet, nor shown you your room, nor asked you to eat, when you must be hungry and tired too, after your ride," said Agnes, in tones of self-reproach, as she returned from the window empty-handed. "Pardon me ! It is so hard to think of anything but baby, now that he is so sick. But I am glad that you are here !"

Poor child ! Repulsion, forebodings, all were forgotten in the joy that she saw before her one who that moment seemed to be the saviour of her child.

Hours later, having partaken of a hearty supper, lulled the heir of Lotusmere into a depth of slumber hitherto unknown in his wailing little life, and kissed Agnes good night with a spontaneity which left that young woman dazed, between her memory of the past and her wonder at the present, Ethelinda Kane sat

alone in her new room. It was a pretty room, the prettiest in the house ; reflecting as did no other in it, save her own, the individual taste and handiwork of Agnes. It was her pet room ; and before Linda came Agnes deemed that she had achieved a great victory over herself, when she brought her mind to a state of willingness to give it up to the daily use of her husband's foster-sister. Its walls were tinted in pale gray, with narrow cornices of azure and gilt. The window and toilet curtains were of sheer embroidered muslin, festooned with blue ribbons. The wall-pockets, the bracket covers, the tidies and toilet mats, on which the flowers of her heart seemed to breathe and bloom, — even the pictures on the walls, — were from the hand of Agnes. No one of these artistic and delicate adornments she thought too fine to be enjoyed ; but when she spontaneously offered them for constant use, it was an extreme test of her devotion. In her occasional mission as child-healer in the upper circles of Ulm, Linda no doubt had slept in grander apartments ; but no room half so dainty as this had ever been placed at her service.

Before Linda came, Agnes was willing that she should occupy her guest-chamber, but now she led little Cyril's saviour into it with positive delight. " This is your own room. Enjoy everything in it that pleases you, as much as ever you can," were the good-night words of Agnes, as with her own hands she lighted the gas, and saw with her own eyes, before parting with her for the night, that everything was in perfect order for the new-comer.

And now with her door ajar, the new-comer sat thinking everything over. Her elbow rested on the

muslin-draped toilet table, her head leaned on her hand, her eyes turned toward the looking-glass, wherein at intervals she consciously viewed herself, while she reviewed the situation. She was perfectly capable of reviewing it in an occult fashion. In a desultory way she had studied much, and thought more. If her passions were ungoverned, not so was her mind. Through all his boyish years she had studied with Cyril, in a disjointed way to be sure, yet one which in her retentive faculties had left many traces of discipline. The city library of Ulm had been her real educator. For twenty years she had drawn weekly from its treasures. While others slept, she read and studied. There was scarcely a book written or translated, in the English language, concerning the night shade of human life and character, that she had not read and pondered over. Swift, subtle, and dangerous was the action of her brain.

"Weak as water!" This was her first ejaculation as she sat, one instant apparently gazing upon her own face in the glass, the next on the exquisitely wrought embroideries of the pincushion cover before her.

"Just fit to make pincushions!" She felt an instinctive scorn for all feminine fine-arts. When necessity compelled her to sew, she chose to make the coarsest masculine garments. The rough texture, the rude work, suited her mood. The delicate robes of women! How she would have hated them and their wearers, had fate forced her to fashion them.

"Just fit to make pincushions, and trumpery like this," tweaking the fluted ruffles of the toilet cover. "And then sit like a dunce, with her baby dying before her eyes; snivelling and making it die faster with

‘soothing syrup.’ I knew that Cyril married the plainest girl in Ulm ; but I thought that she had some spirit, some will, a spark at least. . . . She is as limp as a rag — a perfect cat’s tail. H—um ! I intend to rule this house myself, and her. As for Cyril,” — and a shadow crossed her face at the thought of him, — “ he loves me just as he did when he was a little boy, and I mended his clothes and cooked his dinners, — when he had any. Idiot I was to think, for one instant, that he could love me more or differently ! Here, I see everything just as it is. There, it was impossible. ‘He cannot live without me !’ Of course. But not because he loves me so much ; not at all. It is because he cannot be made wholly comfortable and self-satisfied by any one else. No, not by any one, I don’t care who it is, — least of all by her. I see the dividing wedge she holds, though she has scarcely struck it a blow yet. I will never let him quite satisfy her again, never. And he could never be satisfied long with any one who did not feed his self-love without flagging, — who did not praise him, flatter him without stint or reservation. She is an infant, sure enough. It has never occurred to her but that she is the only woman in the universe for him ; and that she will remain forever the only one. She does not realize how very unusual, how remarkable he is, even in appearance. The world, his world, is full of women who will see it, and say so in sweeter accents than she will care to hear. What did he know of that world and the women in it, when he married her ? He was too poor, and too close a student. The most that he knew was, that in Ulm it was considered a great condescension for John Darcy’s daughter to marry Tim King’s

son. You will find out, my lady, what you don't dream of yet. If I cannot have his whole heart, — and I cannot, — neither shall you. I am here, — no thanks to you. Now I can wait."

"There he comes !"

She knew that Cyril was in the library ; that on his way to his room, he must pass her door ; thus she left it open purposely.

He saw her light streaming into the hall, and as he came opposite to it, there she sat, her face still resting on her hand, no longer turned toward the looking-glass ; it was bent downward as if, unconscious of her surroundings, she was lost in some remote land of thought. She was a natural actress, and could have won fame and fortune on the stage, if fate had kindly led her on to it, instead of leaving her to a life of poverty, chagrin, disappointment, and mischief-making.

"Where are you, Linda ?" said Cyril pleasantly, pausing at the door. "I doubt if you know," he added, as she looked up suddenly, with a startled, innocent look. "But I know that it is good that you are here. I can't tell you how pleasant it seems to see you again, my dear, own sister."

"Nor I, Cyril, how blessed it seems to be here, and to hear you call me sister," she said softly, with the look of startled innocence still in her eyes, which some way made her look years younger, and she knew it. Had she not tried it on often, before the little looking-glass in Ulm, with direct reference to this very moment ? "You will forget, will you not, Cyril, that I was so unhappy once, at the thought of not being more ? It was because you were going away ; because I was so

alone. In losing you, I lost everything. My poverty separated me from my equals. If it had not, how could I care for any one man, Cyril, after you ! You make every other man in the world seem ugly and cheap. I learned what it was to exist without you, Cyril. Live, I never did. Now all I want is to see you, to serve you and Agnes, and little Cyril."

"You are our good angel, Linda. I know that," said Cyril fondly. "What a spell you have wrought, already, upon little Cyril ! He has not been still for so long a time, since he was born. And Agnes, poor child, she will brighten up now, even if you don't manage to keep baby quiet more than a third of the time."

"I am afraid that Agnes must look very much changed to you, Linda ?"

"She shows the effect of her sickness and anxiety, of course," answered Linda. "But it is you, — you who have changed most, Cyril."

"I ! Why, I am as alert as a trapper, and as tough."

"It would take more than one year of mental suffering and care to break down utterly your magnificent health. Agnes evidently has a very weak constitution. She shows physical wear and tear. What is that, compared to mental ? It is you who look mentally and spiritually weary. I, who look at you both freshly and dispassionately, see the difference and make the distinction. You are overtaxed, Cyril. Don't wait for fatal consequences. You must manage some way to have some change — to take more recreation. I am here now on purpose to relieve you. When you wish to be gone from home you will know that Agnes is not alone. And unless you want to break down like so many young professional men, you must do it."

"Nonsense, Linda! I am perfectly sound in body and mind," Cyril answered cheerfully; yet she saw with satisfaction the tide of color come into his face at the suggestion of her words, and was sure that they had their effect.

"'Tis true, I have had great mental anxiety. How could it be otherwise, with Agnes so worn and anxious, and the boy screaming nearly all the time? If he gets on, and those atrocious teeth get safely through, I mean to take a vacation, and give poor Agnes one. We are going up among the Northern lakes and mountains. I to fish, she to sketch, if I can make her forget the baby long enough. These are all her sketches," glancing proudly toward the wall. "They are full of feeling, and, I think, of genius. Examine them, Linda, when you get time; they will bear it, especially this little study of the Sound. Look! The water is a marvel, so transparent in quality! and these long, low bars of clouds, see how filmy and real they are, with the gulls swooping below and the depth of twilight sky beyond. It is really wonderful, the execution! And she has had almost no instruction. And the coloring! It is so warm and tender I feel a glow every time I look at it. She made a copy for my office in town, which surpasses this. It is my pet brag. When anybody notices it, I feel fine to say, 'It was painted by my wife.'"

Linda felt the old wrath surge through her blood while listening to this devoted outburst. She could not trust her voice at once, and was silent till she could bring its tones back to the desired even quality, gazing at the picture meanwhile as if she were studying

it. It hung close before her eyes, yet she did not see a line of it. "Yes, Cyril," she said at last, with unruffled voice. "It is very fine, I have no doubt; but I am not a judge. It is all and more than I have been able to do, you know, to read a few books. I have had no chance to study pictures, and no pictures to study."

"True," said Cyril sympathetically. "But when little Cyril gets through with his teeth — rather when they get through with him — you and Agnes must go into town and study the best pictures there. Agnes has had very little chance. None at all in Ulm, and she has had so much to occupy her since coming here. But she is a natural artist. Look at this room, — all her work!" And he gazed about with an expression of admiring satisfaction.

"It is very pretty — too pretty for me, Cyril. It is not much like the one I have been used to, as you know. I'd really enjoy more a plainer one, one not so full of nicknacks. I shall be in misery for fear of injuring them — for I use my room," said Linda.

"Use away! Agnes wants you to use them up, if necessary to enjoy them. She is wilful; she don't look it, but she is. She said at once, 'Linda shall have the guest-room for her own.' Wasn't that kind of her?"

"Ve-ry." There was a perceptible touch of scorn in Linda's voice, which warned Cyril to change his theme, though next to himself it was his dearest one.

"Tell me about Ulm, Linda," he said suddenly. "Do you ever see any mention of me in the 'Gazette'?"

"Yes," said Linda, the shadow lifting and her eyes

brightening. And she went on to tell of the "favorable notices" of himself which she had read in the "Gazette," cut out, pasted in a scrap-book, and brought to him.

"They are in the bottom of my trunk. You shall read them all to-morrow, Cyril," she said.

This tantalizing delay gave her an opportunity to tell the story of each commendatory paragraph, how she had read it, remembered it, hoarded it for him. And how the Ulm "Gazette," in noting great metropolitan occasions, and public meetings and anniversaries throughout the State, never failed to make special mention of its "talented young townsman, Cyril Kirg, Esquire," whenever a "stirring speech" or "eloquent oration" from him made it possible to do so.

"The last notice said that wherever you go you are acknowledged to be a rising man," declared Linda, her eyes gleaming triumphantly; and this time Cyril's shot back an answering fire. Like precious ointment to his love of approbation was one such notice in the Ulm "Gazette." Published in his native town, for the people who had known him from birth, who had witnessed his early misfortunes and disgraces, it was more flatteringly dear to the drunkard's son than if every column of the leading metropolitan journals had teemed with his praises. Linda led him on from one Ulm paragraph and reminiscence to another, till more than an hour had passed since he entered the room, and he was equally unconscious whether he had been there one hour, or five minutes, or when or how it was that he had taken the easy-chair, in which he leaned back utterly happy, listening and

laughing while she proceeded with her enthusiastic recitals.

To Agnes, waiting alone in another room, the time seemed strangely long, unendurably long at last. She too left her door open that she might hear Cyril's first step when he started to leave the library. It seemed to her pleasant that little Cyril should be peacefully sleeping, so that she could once more listen and wait for his father as she used in the sweet, new times. She felt a pang as she thought how long and full of pain the days had been since she and Cyril were all the world to each other, without even a dear sick baby to take the thought of one from the other. Alas! that little Cyril should have been so sick, and she so anxious, that there was nought of time, or strength, or purpose, left for little Cyril's beautiful papa. "The handsomest man in the world! the most splendid, the grandest, the greatest!" all in all was he that moment to little Cyril's girl-mother. But how long since she had talked lover's talk to Cyril, and told him all this. She seemed to herself to be just waking from a dream, a dream so full of absorbing pain that it had left no consciousness for anything else; but now coming out of it, she loved him just the same, how utterly, how entirely! She could scarcely wait to tell him so, now that she had the chance, and to tell him, too, that she could, yes, she could — love Linda. She could love anybody who could so love and soothe little Cyril. "Beside, Linda has loved *you* so long, and I did not dream that she ever would be so kind to me," she murmured to herself. She heard him coming. She started to run into the hall to meet him just as she used to do

when she recollected that for the first time in their married life there was a third person in the family, who had no share in the dear open love-making which made them so happy of old. So she sank back into her little chair, to welcome him inside of their own door. But as his steps came nearer, nearer, she arose, the words of love trembling on her lips. He paused at Linda's door. That was right, she was glad that he remembered to say good night to Linda; it would take but a minute.

The minutes lengthened on and on. An hour had passed by the little clock on the mantel before her, and still the murmur of voices came to her through the open doors, and at last Cyril's quick, ringing laugh. For months she had not heard that laugh, and now it jarred her, she did not know why. Was it because blending with it were the low, even tones of a voice that was not hers? At this distance the voice sounded sweet, and vibrated with all the eagerness of earnest recital. How weak and tired she felt. She had wept so often and so long, how gladly she would laugh and be happy as they seemed. Her first impulse was to start and join them, but something held her back. They were gay and she was not there. Perhaps they did not want her. Linda, talking of her own affairs to Cyril, might not be willing to share the confidence. So Agnes sank back again into her little rocking-chair, and tried to say bravely, with tears in her eyes, that she would not care. But the more she tried, the more she did care.

"It is all right. It is very unreasonable in me not to be perfectly willing to wait. It is all right — but,

I am lonesome, *very* lonesome. I cannot, cannot wait, not another moment, not now. I have waited nearly two hours ;” and the tears began to flow in earnest.

It was such an utterly new experience that any one should be in their own home engrossing Cyril by the hour, while she sat alone. She could not now adjust her emotions to so disagreeable a fact ; she at least must be stronger and less worn out, first.

The tears were still trickling down her face, nervous, querulous tears, when at the end of at least an hour and a half, all in a glow of self-satisfied triumph, Cyril appeared. Linda had told him so many delightful things that Agnes would be glad to hear, and now he had come to share them all with her.

“Why, what is the matter?”

The dejected attitude of Agnes, the tears on her face and in her eyes, acted upon Cyril in his glowing state precisely like a cold-water douche.

“What *is* the matter, Agnes?”

“I have waited so — so long for you, Cyril,” said she, between two deep sobs.

“That is what I have been doing for you, for the last six months.”

“Never when I could help it, Cyril.”

“That does not alter the fact.”

Nothing could have been harder or more unsympathetic than the tone of voice in which he uttered these words.

Whatever the provocation, he certainly had never spoken to Agnes in such tones before.

“Oh, Cyril, how can you treat me so!” she cried, with a voice in which mental anguish and physical hysteria painfully blended.

If he would have taken her into his arms and spoken to her one gentle word, all would have been changed. In his present state this seemed to be impossible. He had not thought of making her unhappy, nor of neglecting her. Indeed, in praising her to Linda, she seemed nearer to him than she had done for months. It was so pleasant to him to have a listener once more! It was so natural for him to speak to an audience, it really exhilarated him to praise Agnes to somebody. Besides, for an hour he had been drinking in flattery as intoxicating as ever fell upon mortal ear and self-loving heart. It had lifted him instinctively and insensibly into a state of elation and self-satisfaction from which it was not easy to come down.

To think that the world, even the world of Ulm, set so high an estimate upon him, — Cyril King! And this was all that his own wife had to give — tears and complaints!

"I can bear much, Agnes," he said, with a lofty, martyr-like air; "but I shall never bear a scene. Good night;" and stooping, he coolly kissed her forehead, then turned and left the room.

Had he opened the door an instant sooner, he would have seen before it one who was ever seen before she was heard — Ethelinda Kane.

When he first closed the door of his apartment, she started with cat-like step to follow him.

"I will know the result of my first evening's game," she said to herself. "It will be the key to my future course."

Crouching low outside the door, she heard every word that passed between husband and wife. Agnes'

sudden outburst made her think it safer to depart. She retreated across the hall, and stood with her back securely planted against the inside of her own door, when she heard Cyril shut the other with a sharp click, and descend to the library, there to spend his night in solitude.

“ Good for the first night’s work,” she said.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST QUARREL.

DID Ethelinda Kane feel no reproach of conscience as she turned from her door with the descending steps of Cyril still sounding in her ears? She was not wholly bad; no one is. She must have felt some inward remonstrance, for she said aloud, "I can't help it; she took *all* I had. There was enough else that would have done for her, and made her happy; but she took my all, — all! and for me there is nothing left. Shall she have him in peace? Never! She shall pay my price for what she took from me. If she had not taken him, I would never have harmed her. Why should I live alone, — childless, homeless, — while she has all! I must; but I will have my revenge. What right has she to be happy while I am wretched?" Thus she dismissed the thought of Agnes, and weary from her journey and her lavish expenditure of vitality after it, she soon fell asleep, and into happiness; for she dreamed that she and Cyril were living together at Lotusmere, that little Cyril was her boy, and that it was only a dream that there had ever been an Agnes.

Cyril strode into his library feeling that he was an injured individual. That Agnes should make a scene and reproach him for sitting with Linda to hear the news from Ulm, was indeed preposterous. "O tra-

geous!" he exclaimed with deep emphasis of bass, as he plunged into his study chair before his desk, and began rapidly to write. He resumed his task where he left it off, as he supposed for the night, and soon discovered himself pursuing it with a fluency and eloquence which had not touched it before. It was a class oration which he had been invited to deliver within the walls of his Alma Mater. He was proud, when he received the letter of invitation, to think that he had been chosen to deliver it. But in the state of his household it had been no easy task to write, and until to-night he had been tempted to depend upon whatever of impromptu inspiration the occasion might bring to him. Not so now. He was one who produced his finest brain-work under the deepest excitements. Linda's praises, with the thought of the journals of Ulm, of what they would say for and of him if this oration proved to be an intellectual and oratorical success, with the nerve excitement occasioned by his brief word collision with Agnes — all together quickened thought, expression, and pen, to astonishing celerity. It was morning, when turning from his desk in sheer exhaustion, he threw himself on the lounge near by, and fell at once into deep sleep.

When Cyril shut the door and left her, Agnes felt as if she had received a heavy physical blow. She sat stunned and dumb.

Cyril would come back, of course he would. He could not be angry with her! When he came back she would tell him that if she seemed querulous, it was only because she loved him so much; that it was because she was so lonely without him, that she complained

She would tell him that she was sorry, and ask him to forgive her and love her as if nothing had happened. Long she sat waiting, listening, but he did not come. She grew cold at last, and creeping into bed, drew her baby close to her, and her silent tears fell upon his wasted little face. They wakened him, and he sent out his accustomed wail. But Agnes did not think of calling his nurse, or Linda, or Cyril.

"You are all mine, baby, — all I have," she said, with the exaggeration of sorrow, her low, choking sobs mingling with his faint cries. "Nobody will love mamma but baby — poor little baby! Will you live to love her? And who loves baby like mamma? Baby, *we* are all alone." This thought was too dreadful to take on another word, and for moments no other divided the low sobbing and wailing of mother and child. "Where is papa, baby? Has he forgotten little Cyril and mamma! I *must* go to him." Again the tears fell in silence upon the baby's face. He slept at last. Then Agnes, rising softly, lest she might waken him, wrapped a shawl about her and with noiseless steps crept out of the room.

She would go to him; she could not live the night through, she thought, he down there and she here, — words, anger, desolation between them. He was Cyril, her husband, her idol. Earth held nothing for her, nothing, if he was estranged. She would tell him so. She would beg him, yes, beg him to forgive her.

She creeps out to the upper landing softly — how softly! — down the carpeted stairs, till midway she is confronted by a blaze of light from the open library door. In the same instant she hears Cyril's voice.

"Is it possible!" says jealousy, the demon just born for her; "is it possible that she has followed him here!" No; listen!

"What is it men love in genius, but its infinite hope, which degrades all that it has done? Genius counts all its miracles poor and short. Its own idea is never executed. The Iliad, the Hamlet, the Doric column, the Roman arch, the Gothic minster, the German anthem, when they are ended, the master casts behind him. Before that gracious Infinite out of which he drew these few strokes, how mean they look, though the praises of the world attend them. From the triumphs of his art he turns with desire to this greater defeat. Let those admire who will. With silent joy he sees himself to be capable of a beauty that eclipses all which his hands have done, all which human hands have ever done. . . . Obedience to his genius is a man's only liberating influence; only by the freest activity in the way constitutional to him, does an angel seem to arise before him, and lead him by the hand out of all the wards of the prison."

Cyril, in exalted tones, is pronouncing the oration which is sure, at a day not very far on, to bedew the eyes of women with tears and to stir the feet of men to storms of commendation. The open door is behind the desk. Thus Agnes can approach and look through, and listen without the slightest risk of discovery from her rapt lord. Imagination in her is by no means a dormant faculty. In her anguish up-stairs she had pictured Cyril below, extended on the lounge in half-savage, but wide-awake sorrow — waiting, yes, waiting for her to come to be taken back into his arms and hi

favor. Sorrow! He looks as radiant as a god. He is in nowise prostrate, but stands waving his manuscript and throwing up his arms in all the glowing passion of oratorical utterance. He became so excited and delighted with what he had written that from sudden impulse he sprang to his feet to deliver it. Agnes is well acquainted with Cyril, but not with the orator. Beyond a little impromptu witty speech which she heard him make in a political meeting at Lotusport, she never had an opportunity to judge of his transcendent powers as a speaker. Was this Cyril! If so, never was she so far from his thoughts as in the present moment. The wife kneels low in the half-open door, gazes, listens, and adores. The last word is not too strong to express the emotion aroused in her sensitive nature by his golden eloquence. She would have thrilled to it anywhere, uttered by any voice but Cyril's, — her husband's. It is more entrancing to her, than the music of the sirens ever was to Orpheus. Yet Ulysses was not more chained to his mast than is Agnes to the door-sill. Cyril's face is half turned from hers, and as he utters the last sentence, his hand falls by his side; he immediately sits down to his desk and resumes his writing.

She cannot break in upon one so preoccupied. Her intellectual sympathy with him holds back her impetuous heart. Were she merely a petty and selfish woman, her own loneliness and grief would be preëminent, stronger than every other consideration. She would be simply angry or outraged because he had forgotten her in intellectual toil and pleasure.

It would make her happy — how happy! — if he

thought of her now, and wished to share this triumph with her, — for triumph she deemed it, — but he was still absorbed with his task. When it was finished he would come to her, she said; she was sure that he would, he could not help it. She would go back, watch with little Cyril, and wait for him. She went back; she waited long. Was it only for a night? To her it seemed an age. In this new-born sense of desolation even little Cyril was forgotten. When the clock on the mantel struck the hour of four of the morning, and still the strained ears caught no sound of Cyril's coming, again his absence seemed insupportable, and she once more crept forth silently to seek him. This time she would say to him, "Forgive me, take me back into your heart. I cannot live with any shadow between thee and me, even for a night." As she crept down the stairs no lance of light shot athwart them from the open door below. No sonorous voice filled the air. All was dark and silent. No, a new sound broke the stillness. She paused and listened. It was the deep, regular breathing of Cyril. He was asleep; he was — yes, he was snoring. There was no other word to express the sounds which rose upon the air with every breath of the deep-chested man asleep upon his back. So while she had been waiting, weeping for him, thinking of him, wanting him only, he had been utterly indifferent to her, asleep, and snoring! Foolish child! The shock which this fact gave to her sensibilities was more electric than her sorrow. It sent her back to her bed and to her babe filled with a passionate sensation of injury. Could she have treated Cyril thus? With such cool indifference could she have gone to sleep while he watched and waited for her?

Never!

But this was not *her* Cyril. It was somebody else. It was a new Cyril, born with the coming of that woman across the hall. Why had she come? To rob her of her life! Of her husband! Could *her* home ever be what it was before *she* came? Never! Would Cyril ever be again to her just as he was before those other eyes were fixed on him, watching him? "She does watch him, I saw her!" exclaimed Agnes, passionately, throwing one weary arm above her head, turning spasmodically upon her pillow; her throat parched, her veins burning with fever, her nerves strained to a tension of pain which made self-control impossible. "How can home ever be the same again with her watching him and me with those dreadful eyes?" And Linda's eyes stared at her through the darkness with all the maliciousness of their first stony gaze, which she had so long and painfully remembered. "Yet she was kind to *you*, baby, very kind," she added, pitifully, again drawing little Cyril close to her heart; and thus, in the first gray light of the morning, she sank at last into the sleep of exhaustion.

Agnes spoke seeing dimly, yet she spoke the truth. A crisis had reached her home. No home can be just what it was before, when it has been entered by the third person, who, without belonging actually to its life, is yet to be its inmate. There are two pictures of the maiden aunt, and each equally faithful to its subject. One is framed beautifully in fiction and song; the other, the torture and bane of domestic peace, is rarely portrayed, — it is more than enough that she *lives*. The maiden aunt of the novel is pale, patient,

and much abused. Her early and only love has gone to heaven, where she expects to join him; and by way of preparation, washes the children's faces, makes and mends their clothes, endures their naughtiness with the imperturbability of a saint. She accepts the slights, scoldings, drudgery, and cast-off clothing of her sister-in-law with the grace of a Christian and the countenance of a martyr, or endures the unwilling toleration of her brother-in-law with the meekness which in itself is a guarantee of the kingdom of heaven.

But in actual life how often the maiden aunt who derives a parasitic existence from the family of another either never had a lover, or lost him through the fault of her own nature; and for this cause alone never forgives the woman, whose home she shares, the fact that this woman has a husband and is the mother of children. Useful she is, indispensable she may be in the routine of domestic labor, and yet no less is she a spiritual disturber, an actual maker of mischief, the secret and often unknown source of misunderstanding, estrangement, and sorrow inexpressible. Where one family is made happier by the fatal third person, many are made wretched, and not a few are finally broken up and destroyed through such an influence.

When Cyril awoke in the morning his first thought was of his oration. His first act was to snatch it from his desk, return to his lounge, and there re-read at his leisure page after page of the glowing sentences which so exhilarated and exalted him in feeling the night before. They rang out with added force and fire in the gray morning light, and as he read the last, Cyril rose

in the full assurance that he had achieved the finest mental success of his life. What with his presence, his soul, which he would add in the delivery of these æsthetic thoughts and rhythmical sentences, Cyril seemed to hear already the applause which waited his eager ears and proudly-beating heart a few weeks further on. He next proceeded to take a bath and to make a careful toilet for his day in the city. Did no thought of Agnes cross his mind? Certainly. But it was the thought that she had behaved in a very childish and foolish manner the night before, and must be punished; mildly of course, but still punished as a child. She had presumed to do an almost unprecedented thing, surely unprecedented so far as his association with women was concerned. She had been displeased with him, and had found fault with him — with him, whom everybody else was so ready to like and to praise. For a wonder, little Cyril's voice was not heard, and there was nothing to disturb the lofty self-consciousness and the serene self-satisfaction of his papa, as that gentleman proceeded to take his bath.

Agnes was wakened from her late and troubled sleep by her boy, and before she had really come back to her wretched self of the night before, there came a low rap at the door, and as she said, "Come," with Cyril in the word, her door opened and Linda entered the room. She wore a neat calico morning-dress and white apron, and looked perfectly at home and ready for work.

"I heard Cyril in the hall," she said, and "thought you might like me to come in to keep baby quiet while you dress, as you say his nurse can't do it

Come, little Cyril, — come to auntie Linda!" She spoke with seeming unconsciousness of any trouble whatever, in just the tone in which she said good night to Agnes, in parting the night before, and apparently knew nothing of anything which occurred afterwards.

Agnes, without guile herself, through her fine instincts might scent duplicity as a repelling and unknown quality, but she did not understand it by any possible process of her own nature.

She was disarmed at once. The repulsion born of her loneliness and sorrow the night before melted and dispersed under Linda's soft voice and helpful words. A moment before she felt too weak to rise. She was equal to the effort now, especially when she saw little Cyril smile in Linda's arms.

"If he would only look like that when his nurse holds him, I should not have such serious times trying to dress in the morning," she said, with tears in her voice, though her eyes were smiling.

"I fear you are not feeling very well," said Linda sympathetically.

The sympathy in the tone touched the heart-spring, and the tears started. They were gone when she answered, "No, I've grown foolishly weak. I cry without any provocation. From nervousness, I say. All women do, don't they? It's because I've lost so much sleep."

"We won't let her lose any more, will we, baby?" said Linda, proceeding to bathe and robe the little man for the day, as if it were her usual morning occupation.

"How kind you are!" said Agnes self-reproachfully

When Cyril came into the breakfast-room, fresh from his bath and all in a glow of unconscious health and conscious triumph, and his sight fell upon Agnes awaiting him at the breakfast-table, he felt a shock for which he was unprepared.

A week of heart-grief and of sleepless nights would not have left the traces upon his powerful face which one night had stamped upon hers. The pallor, the dark circles around the heavy eyes, the emaciation, appealing before, were startling now.

Cyril might be selfish to a degree that sometimes amounted to cruelty, but he could not be deliberately cruel, nor unkind, — not then.

“Bless me, Agnes!” he exclaimed, “what have you been doing with yourself!” the sight of her face scattering at once every thought of the lofty and injured air with which he had intended to address her.

“I am sorry” — he was going to say, “I am sorry that I did not come back and make up with you, sweetheart, before I went to sleep last night;” but that instant he caught the steady gaze of Linda’s eyes fixed upon him, and was reminded of the fact which that gaze made perfectly apparent, that he had not spoken to her before, had not even seen her. Also he felt the unpleasant sensation that for the first time he could not say just what was in his heart to Agnes at their own table, because a third person was there, who ought to have no share in their personal life.

“Good morning, Linda,” he said, with an easy nonchalance perfectly natural to him; “excuse me for not seeing you, but really, Agnes has been shut in that dark room so long, I did not know how she looked

With a good daylight view of her I was so astonished to see her seem so ill, I could not see anything else."

"Never mind," he said tenderly, addressing his wife, "now you will have a little chance for your life, and we will soon have you looking as good as new. I'll leave town at noon and come to take you to an afternoon drive, the day is so sunny," he added, acting at once upon one of his sudden, generous impulses, which so often made him charming — which, alas! are always so much more charming than stolid, to-be-depended-upon goodness that seldom fails, and never surprises.

"Will you?" exclaimed Agnes, her face lighting, as a moment before it would have seemed impossible. "Will you? but baby!"

"Thank Heaven! Baby is no longer to be allowed to kill you by inches. Linda will take care of baby, won't you, Linda?"

Linda was sufficiently wretched at the sight of this kindling love and happiness, to have inflicted a killing sting. Fate allowed her only to use just a touch of the gall of bitterness in her tone, as she answered, —

"Certainly. What else did I come for but to tend baby, that his mother may get well?"

Foolish Agnes! As the sun could be blotted out by a word from this man, so the world, her world, was made anew in the light of his smile.

Cyril kept his word. Little Cyril in Linda's arms seemed feebly, yet blissfully content, so the poignant arrow of his cry did not pierce his young mother's joy. For months she had not passed her own gate. In the sunshine of this late April day, almost lost in sof

warm wraps, leaning on her husband's arm as he drove under the leafless elms and maples, past the long Lotusport street, within sight of the Sound, yet under the shelter of the peaceful Connecticut hills, it seemed to her that she was just beginning again life and love. It was as if little Cyril, and Linda, and the night before were not, and had never been. They were lovers again, free as the winds, happy as the hours were long, not a shadow of a doubt between them. Agnes, instinctively shy and silent with strangers, when she was herself, prattled like a child to Cyril.

"It would all seem like a dreadful dream that we quarrelled and were parted last night," she said, "if I had not heard it. I heard it, and forgot my trouble, it was so beautiful."

"Heard what, sweetheart?"

"Your oration!"

"Heard it! How? Where?"

"In the library door. I was there nearly all the time that you were reading it. Oh, Cyril, I felt so proud of you! so proud! It was so eloquent!"

He turned and looked down upon her as she uttered these words. There was a pink flush on her pale cheeks, the warmth of appreciation, enthusiasm, and love in her eyes, — all his. He stooped and kissed her.

Linda's praise had been sweet, but it was poor compared with this from Agnes — his wife. It was to be his lot to receive more than man's common share, but of all to be lavished upon him, never was he to hear any so unexpected, so unselfish, so pure and precious as this. When her face looked out upon him through

the shadows of the afterwards, whatever other look it took on before it faded, it always bore the glance of exaltation and love which made it, at this moment, at once so lovely and so dear.

“Strange,” said Linda with deepening wretchedness, as she watched the carriage roll up the avenue to the house an hour later, “strange, after such a night, such billing and cooing as this. After all, they are in love yet; no evading that fact, Linda Kane.”

She ignored the fact that love, if it be love, never dies of its first wound. With its own balsam it heals its own bruises; it survives its deepest hurt — lives, endures on, hiding inviolable from the light of day its secret, sacred, and oft-bleeding scars.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PHOTOGRAPH.

"Do you mind if I take down your little study of the Sound, and hang Cyril's picture in its place? It has hung so long where it was the last thing that I saw at night and the first in the morning, I miss it, although I see him every day," said Linda to Agnes, the day after her happy drive with her husband.

"Certainly not," was her cordial answer. "The idea of anybody being contented with the Sound, when she can see Cyril! Baby's asleep, and I'll come and help you hang it."

When she spoke of Cyril's picture, the outline of a precious old likeness of him which had long been Linda's passed before Agnes' mind, — a picture of Cyril in his boyhood, and she was all eagerness to see it.

"You don't mind, do you?" said Linda, with an arch glance, mockingly in contrast with the drawn lines of her face. "I knew you wouldn't mind," noting Agnes' look of astonishment, as, halting in the door of Linda's room, she saw her own sketch, its face to the wall, upon the floor, and in its place a new, richly-mounted, imperial photograph of Cyril, certainly new, for she recognized in it the suit which he wore but the summer before.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I didn't know that you had 't hung already."

"I knew you wouldn't mind, and Cyril said so too. He hung it himself last evening, while you were busy with baby. Of course I shouldn't have thought of doing such a thing without asking your permission ; but you and Cyril are one, you know, and *he* wished it. I spoke to get just your feeling. Had you not been perfectly willing I was going to put the other back directly, Cyril thinks it such a wonder. I turned it to the wall, that not a speck of dust might touch it."

"Thank you," — coldly — but why so coldly Agnes for her life could not have told. She honestly wished that Cyril's beautiful picture should fill the place of her sketch. Linda's atmosphere, even more than her act or her words, chilled Agnes.

"Don't you think this the best picture that Cyril ever had taken ? So life-like ! So speaking ! I said to him that I knew you must have seated him, and stood within sight as an inspiration. He is *always* in a state of exaltation when he wears that look. I was astonished enough when he said 'No,' — that you were not with him when it was taken. That you did not even know that he sent it. How did *that* happen ? I thought you went everywhere with him last summer. You must give him a little curtain lecture, and impress upon his mind that nothing begets distrust in a husband or wife like secrecy on either side. Of course it was only carelessness. He could have no object in keeping you from knowing that he was sending his picture to *me*."

"Surely not," said Agnes confusedly, yet loyally "How could he ! There is nothing on earth I admire so much as Cyril's picture, except himself. There

can't be too many, nor too many who have them, to please me. Cyril knew how I hated the cars and the city last summer, and did not want to trouble me to go. Not that I should have thought it a trouble on such an errand. But Cyril is so kind he always tries to spare me in every way, and sitting for a photograph, you know, is sometimes very tedious work."

"For some people, certainly," said Linda, with emphasis. "Never for Cyril. No matter how he looks or feels, he can't help making a splendid picture. But of course there is a choice in attitudes, and in frames, and you are so artistic. I don't see how he brought himself to decide, without the aid of your judgment."

"What! when he didn't need it?" said Agnes with a make-believe of a smile. "Could anything be more absolutely perfect than this frame for his style?" looking fondly at the radiant face smiling down upon her from its setting of blue velvet and gold. And as she looked a faint pang would strike through her heart, at the thought that this was the first time that she had seen or heard of this beautiful likeness of her husband.

Agnes might have in her the making of an artist, but never that of an actress. She was too real for that. It was not in her power to pretend to anything that she did not feel. Her critic, Mrs. Flint, had declared it to be "one of her faults, that she showed everything in her face," "a sure sign of lack of self-control," that lady added.

The heaviness which rested on it now, as she stooped to lift her little sketch from the floor, did not escape Linda. The words Agnes had uttered had been perfectly sincere. They expressed what her heart was

trying to believe, even in the pain of a new hurt. She had very little of the knowledge of human nature, which comes from actual contact with varied types, and the infallible conviction born of profound experience; but in their stead she had keen instincts, and clear intuitions; through these she knew that Linda's words to her had been uttered with a motive, — an unfriendly motive, she felt, toward herself. All the wherefore of that motive it was at present beyond her power to comprehend.

Not so with Linda. She measured her victim perfectly in her capacity to suffer pain, and with equal accuracy she gauged her own power to inflict it.

She knew just how far the subtle darts sunk, which she had driven in, and just how deep the wounds would rankle in Agnes' heart.

Agnes' first conscious effort was "not to mind." She took the sketch which Cyril so genuinely admired down into the library, and there hung it where his eyes would naturally rest upon it when they looked up from his desk. In doing this she had two thoughts: one, that it would give him pleasure; another, that seeing it there might remind him to speak to her of the picture which had taken its place up-stairs, and which to her he had never mentioned.

"Why did he not mention it?" mused Agnes to herself, as she sat in her low chair, slowly rocking little Cyril in her arms. "I am sure I never should have objected to Linda's having his picture. Nothing could be more natural and right than that she should have it. Then why did not he speak of it? As Linda said, I don't see how he could help wanting my opinion of his

picture. Why, I could no more send away mine without his judgment of it, than I could fly. I should never think, even, of doing anything without telling Cyril. I tell him everything. And nobody, nobody, if I had not seen that picture, could have made me believe that Cyril could have a secret, even the slightest, that he kept from me. I don't understand it."

Cyril came home that evening with his mercury at zero. He was preoccupied and irritated. Not that he wished to be or even knew that he was either. But his whole thought was concentrated on some disagreeable work that he had to do. He intended to have devoted his evening to completing the copying and elaboration of his oration. Instead, he had to rummage back a century or two in search of the tedious authorities bearing upon a still more tedious law-suit which did not interest him personally an atom. Never so much as at this moment did he rebel against being the working-man of his firm. His partners, elderly and rich, had made enough of fortune and fame to ride at their leisure in luxurious coaches to and fro between their "down-town" office, and "up-town" "palatial" houses, leaving younger and poorer men to do all the actual work of the establishment. Of this Cyril, as its most promising young member, bore the lightest share. Still certain cases came to him whose drudgery he could not evade, and this was one of them.

"Not long, not long, I'll dig," he said, giving the tedious papers before him a contemptuous push as he picked up just behind them a few loose leaves of his oration — his eyes running over them with unabated delight. "I *can* work; I would climb if I could not fly

but as I can, I will. Ve-ry much to their amazement those old gentlemen will open their eyes some morning to find me perched above them. I'll dig till I see my chance — then" — And with these words he slowly opened his briefs and went to work as clearly and pertinaciously as if he had been born a plodder, and never dreamed of flying. In this width, accuracy, and concentration of mental vision, in this will to do, as well as the capacity to fly, centred the secret of his power and the promise of his future.

He dug through tome after tome, he worked well and late. The big books were thrust back into their places. The briefs were re-folded and re-tied all ready for his city start in the morning. Then, as Cyril threw back his head and clasped his hands behind it, a fashion of his when starting on a train of satisfactory meditation, he first saw in its place, Agnes' sketch.

"Awkward!" he exclaimed; "why didn't I go directly to her last night, as I intended, after hanging that confounded photograph? I remember! Linda diverted my mind by what she said about the oration. She must have come in here and read every word of it, and on the spur of what she said I rushed down here to begin to copy, and forgot everything else, of course. A pretty mess! Well, if I had explained last night, I've no doubt I should have been too humble. I should have shown her that my motive was a good one, and have told her I was sorry that I had given her pain, though I had done so in trying to save her from it. Now I shall take a high ground, and maintain it; the only course, if her mind is made up in advance, as it is, no doubt. A most exacting mind, — yet who would

think it to look at her? I would as soon be under the gaze of a Roman inquisitor as that of Agnes, if I had been doing anything she thought 'not right'! A perfect Puritan in conscience; the result of training, I suppose, so different from mine. But no matter what his training, no fellow could feel comfortable under a look which told him plainer than words that his wife had a poor opinion of him — which Agnes has not of me, thank Heaven! Poor little girl! I see that it could seem hard about that photograph in a way that Linda might tell it, though I hope she didn't. And to find her own picture, into which she had put so much of her soul, down on the floor without a word from me — after all, I think I will tell her that I am sorry."

He ended his soliloquy with his better self; nevertheless he was relieved when on going up-stairs he found Agnes asleep with little Cyril on her arm. He awoke in the morning full of the "case" in which he was to appear as counsel in court that day. He did not think of the picture again, not even when he went into the library to gather up his briefs.

Thus Agnes had another day to think about it. She tried to put it out of her mind; the more she tried the more closely it clung. It was true, as Cyril said, she had an exacting mind, as all persons who love justice and truth powerfully do have. She was most exacting with herself. Her large charity made her slow to measure or to judge others; no less the exacting mind, ignorant in its very demand, mused painfully over what it could not comprehend. Baby-rocking, providing the baby is quiet, is a fruitful feeder to thought, and to-day little Cyril, as if by premeditated understand-

ing, gave his mamma undisturbed opportunity for the mental contemplation of his papa. It was by no means the best thing for her to do, but she unconsciously did it. Linda saw that she did — that she was abstracted and silent — and was glad. Agnes was not judging Cyril. But the tenacious mind kept uttering its exacting “Why?” “Why should he hide anything from me? why, in fact, deceive me even in a little thing?” There was one inevitable conclusion. She must ask him.

“I must ask him, baby. I cannot put it out of my mind, because I cannot understand it; and there must be no misunderstanding — not the slightest — between baby’s papa and me. If there is not perfect confidence, how can we be happy, or make you happy, baby?”

“I will ask him, but ask him so tenderly he will know I am not vexed with him,” said the fond heart at last to the quivering nerves, as Agnes laid little Cyril down that she might dress for his father’s return.

Cyril came home still absorbed with his lawsuit. He was busy amid his briefs, references, and authorities, when just before retiring, Agnes appeared in the library. This was not a very unusual thing for her to do. In the dear, old days she always came in to kiss him good night if any special task kept him up very much later than herself. This was her intention to-night, but, “Before the parting kiss there must be a perfect understanding,” she said to herself. Like all persons of a gentle, affectionate heart and excitable temperament, the very effort she made to speak of a disagreeable subject at all, perturbed her manner and sharpened her accents till, without an impulse of the sort, she appeared in all the disadvantage of seeming irritable.

Cyril, looking up from his papers and seeing her disturbed countenance, thought that his little inquisitor had come. This put him immediately upon the defensive.

"I — I want to get it out of my mind, Cyril, about the photograph up-stairs. Why didn't you tell me about it, Cyril?" she asked at once.

"Because you are so unreasonable. If you used your reason as Linda does, I should not only have told you, but have taken you to town for your suggestions when I sat for it. But I knew you would only cry, because I was going to send the picture at all, and I was not going to be such a goose as to make myself miserable when I could help it — and you also — just about nothing. For it was Linda's right to have the picture if she wanted it, and I wanted to give it to her."

"I am sure I think so, Cyril; I don't think I would have cried about it, for it was just that Linda should have the picture. But it makes me cry to think you did not confide in me, and was ready to — to deceive me about it. I couldn't have done so to you, Cyril, I couldn't, and nobody could have made me believe that you would do anything that you were not willing to tell me."

"Nonsense! There is not one man in ten thousand, who tells his wife everything he does. I have spoiled you by running to you with everything, till because I thought it wise and proper to withhold one thing, you feel injured."

"Cyril, I don't know how to make you understand just how I feel. I don't expect to have you tell me everything — not about your business, nor about things

I don't understand. But in anything that concerns us personally, our life, our love, — oh, don't let there be the slightest concealment! It makes me so unhappy! I haven't a thought, I couldn't have one, that I would not tell you."

"No, I suppose not. But really, don't take the trouble, not now. Was there ever a woman to get up a scene on so small a provocation, and at such inopportune times! And I can sit up all night" (reproachfully) "to pay for your little pastime. You see all that I have to do," pointing to the desk covered with papers, "but my work amounts to nothing, though it pays for your bread and butter, if you have taken it into your head to be miserable over some foolish whim not of the slightest consequence."

"Forgive me, Cyril!" The heaped-up papers, the work that must be done — the instant she was conscious of them, Agnes felt herself to be the culprit. "She might have waited, she ought to have waited," she said to herself — as she certainly ought to have done, to have gained the end she sought. Her presence in her state of mind surely proved in her a lack of tact. A stone image would have been as sympathetic as Cyril in his present mood.

He turned to his desk and began coolly to open and to scan some papers.

"Good night, Cyril. You forgive me" (in a tremulous tone) "for troubling you when you are so busy?"

"Certainly."

"May I kiss you good night?"

"Certainly." He turned slightly, so that she could

reach his forehead with her lips, but proffered no return.

"Cyril" (slowly), "won't you kiss me good night?"

"Yes, I'll do anything, if you will stop boring me and leave me to do my work;" and he turned his face and kissed her as mechanically as if he had been one automaton and she another.

It was this coldness, this hardness — this stratum in his nature which she had never struck before — which penetrated and benumbed her. Then in an instant her heart seemed to swell to bursting.

The understanding, the reunion which she came in to seek were forgotten. She was conscious of nothing but that she had angered him and hindered him without intending to do so, and that he did not seem to love her at all, and that she must flee from his sight before she troubled him more.

She paused at the door, — turned with a mighty impulse to throw her arms about his neck, to fall down at his feet, anything, everything, to bring back into his face the look of love in which she had lived and had her being so long.

Scratch, scratch, went his pen. "He has forgotten me already," she said.

"Twice, twice, in one little week," she murmured in her anguish to baby up-stairs. "Twice in one week, bitter words have passed between us — and never once in all the eighteen months before! Oh, baby, what has befallen us!"

In the morning, Linda had the happiness to see that a cloud rested on the two whose lives she had already done so much to mar.

It rose and lightened and utterly passed, within a day or two, as it inevitably would do. If "love is very quarrelsome," it is also very forgiving. Two who truly love, and who are truly wedded, can bear anything, almost, of infirmity, of injury even, rather than to live together, yet to be apart in spirit and in heart.

One day Cyril returned from town all elation. The lawsuit had been decided in favor of his client. It was an important one, and the decision was a triumph for the influential law-firm of which he was a member, and besides was considered a personal triumph for the talented young lawyer who conducted the case. He had received congratulations from fellow-members of the bar, and every minor fret and dissatisfaction went down under the tide of good feeling which swept through him from this open gate of success. In this state of mind and emotion he opened the door upon Agnes playing with little Cyril.

She was slowly swinging before his eyes, enticing him to stretch out his little hands to catch it, an open gold locket suspended from a chain, containing a miniature of his handsome father. It was one of Cyril's engagement presents to Agnes. He recognized it instantly, and in the same instant saw that his wife and child made a pretty picture. Both were dressed for his coming — the mother in a fresh robe of soft texture and hue, relieved with the bright, warm red which her pallor needed, and in which Cyril's eyes delighted, and the baby in a fresh, white frock and dainty sacque of bright blue wool. He was playing, not vociferously, certainly — but the sight of his stretching out his tiny hands to catch the locket at all was a marvel and a de

ight. And both looked so pretty ! If they had not, it would not be true to say that they would have attracted the husband and father at once or as positively as they did. Besides, for a wonder, Linda was not by, looking on. Cyril felt the fact, without thinking of it. Had she been there something would have kept him from speaking out all that he felt. Now he walked directly to Agnes, kissed her and the baby, and said, —

“How pretty we look to-day, baby and his mother. All bright for papa, and papa’s a lucky fellow,” holding the locket nearer little Cyril’s face. “He has beaten Flyng and Flyght so they will never peep again ; never, little King. So much for the old fellow.”

“Have you, truly, Cyril ?” exclaimed Agnes, in perfect delight. She knew nothing whatever of the merit of the case. Only it was so heavenly to have Cyril win, and come home so radiantly handsome and lover-like, just as he used to do.

“Yes, I have, indeed. A big thing in the profession. Every fellow says so. Well, I did not think you would be quite so glad about it,” catching her beaming glance. “Look here, little girl ! Now isn’t this pleasant ! We won’t have any more tiffs, will we ? I dare say I was a bear the other night. But it is no use trying to pin me tight to your code of rectitude. I am a man, and must have a little margin for my natural depravity. I could not be as microscopically conscientious as you are, no matter how I tried. I don’t believe many women are. *You* are John Darcy’s daughter, a Puritan by blood and instinct. That’s the kind of woman you are, Aggie. Don’t chasten me too

sorely for being made out of such different stuff, — don't ! ”

From these words, one would suppose that Agnes had been “punishing” him with her tongue, at least for the last twenty-four hours, whereas no word of inquiry or of accusation had passed her lips since she left the library, two evenings before. There had been an impalpable barrier of reserve between them, that was all ; that was enough to make each uncomfortable or unhappy when either was conscious of it.

It was perfectly characteristic that Cyril should assume the attitude of the aggrieved or injured one. In both their differences it was Agnes who had begged to be forgiven. Cyril could “lump” his faults, deprecate them in a general way ; but to acknowledge, or ask pardon for any special sin, was repugnant to his constitution, and contrary to all his past experience.

Nevertheless, his half-deprecating, half-appealing tones, now, were so winning — he, himself, so altogether charming. — that for the instant, Agnes’ just and measuring mind vanished as utterly as if she had never had one, while her heart leaped up to its idol. She laid little Cyril, locket in hand, in his crib, and without a word threw her arms about her husband’s neck, and kissed and kissed him. This was what she wished to do in the library two nights before. It was as impossible then as it was inevitable now. He was the same man, to be sure, but the same man divided by such extreme and alien moods, that, for a kissing purpose, he might just as well have been two. In that last, long kiss he was forgiven by his wife, as utterly as if she had never thought that he needed forgiveness. “We are just as

we were before I saw the photograph," she said to herself. Yet the fact remained in her mind, without her being conscious of it. Now, she knew that he was quite equal to doing anything that he saw fit to do, without her knowledge, and without giving her his confidence. Before she knew it she would not have believed it ; and now that she did know it, when she thought of it the thought was full of pain. This and much more might have been true, and if there had not been an alien spirit in her home, Agnes might have seen many happy years.

With Linda's help little Cyril decidedly improved. To be sure, she could not change his organization, nor prevent his teeth from coming, nor make their passage easier, nor make him forsake his evening colic, which he still observed with aggravating punctuality, as if through sheer force of habit ; but she could and did make all these drawbacks to the delight of baby's existence easier to bear. She could almost always soothe him when nobody else could, and if she could not, she could carry him beyond the hearing of his father. This was but for transient times and seasons. Even little Cyril had his hours for sleeping and for growing in his sleep, like other babies ; and, as a rule, when husband and wife sat down together, they shared each other's society with Linda. Agnes' heart rebelled against this third presence more than she knew, or if she had known, more than she would have dared to acknowledge to herself. It was not the mere fact of Linda's being there, upon which she dwelt ; but upon the fact, to her unaccountable and painful, that Cyril never seemed just the same in his manner to her before

Linda, that he did when they were alone together. If he broke out in his old spontaneous style it seemed to her that he immediately caught himself, looked at Linda as if to see how she bore it, and immediately addressed to her some propitiatory or conciliatory remark. It was as if he were constantly asking pardon of Linda for being fond of his wife. If his words conveyed no such impression, his manner certainly did. Herein another psychological "why" rose up to torture the mind of Agnes. Why was Cyril not just the same to her before Linda that he was in her absence? He was not afraid of Linda? How preposterous! He did not change his ways an iota on her account, and yet, in her presence, he did often change his tone and manner to his own wife, if, in an unguarded moment, they burst away from pleasant commonplace into fondness.

With the photograph fresh in her mind she shrank from asking him the longed-for reason. It seemed to her that he was unconscious of one, and that if she asked him he would feel hurt. If Linda had shown a trace of her old hatred toward herself in word or look, all would have been explained. But Linda was all kindness and devotion to her, especially in the presence of Cyril. She seemed to make it her study to anticipate all of Agnes' little wants, and to run and wait upon her as if she had been a child. To Agnes, who was naturally self-helpful, such extreme service was sometimes irksome, but to have manifested any emotion but pleasure would have seemed ungrateful as well as ungracious.

"Really, Linda is right hand to you, isn't she, Agnes

How did you ever get on before she came, and how could we get along without her?" said Cyril one evening in her presence.

Linda accepted this outburst with a little deprecating word and way, which Agnes did not contradict or reassure.

"Linda does more than she ought to do," she said simply. "Coldly" Cyril thought, who did not understand the feeling that prompted the remark; "truly" Linda knew, who understood it perfectly. She was well aware that with all her kindness, there was not a day that she did not manage to make Agnes uncomfortable, if not unhappy.

A nature perfectly sincere and truthful, no matter what its intellectual quality may be, is never a match for a nature full of guile; for if by painful experience it learns what the weapons of such a nature are, it can never stoop to use them.

Nothing save sin was more hateful to Agnes than unnecessary mystery. Hints, innuendoes, and exclamations unfinished and unexplained always bewildered or irritated or grieved her. If she had anything to say, she said it fully and frankly. If it were best that it should not be said, she kept silent and made no reference to it. But Linda was full of mysteries, hints, ejaculations, and innuendoes, which always implied a deeper something unspoken and unexplained.

She would hint of facts in Cyril's past life of which Agnes never dreamed, with the full inference that they were facts that would make Agnes very unhappy if she could know of their real nature, but never stating what their real nature was. She insisted on copying law

papers for Cyril, and under pretext of helping Agnes or attending little Cyril during the day, she was sure to delay such copying till late in the evening, when she could take it into the library and pursue it under Cyril's directions. It was very foolish and jealous in Agnes, no doubt, to come softly sometimes and shut the door of her own sitting-room, that she might shut out the low, even, intense tones of Linda's voice indulging in long discourse in spite of the copying.

"I cannot bear it," she would say, for she knew what it would bring her the next day in the shape of hints of what "he said" followed by the sudden ejaculation, "Oh! but I must not tell—I promised Cyril not to tell."

"Not me?"

"No, for it's really of no consequence—but so strange."

Linda possessed to perfection the subtle and cruel faculty of seeming to pay a compliment and in the same sentence making you appear to painful disadvantage. She was prolific in such compliments to Agnes, addressed to Cyril. When the disparagement came in he would look up as if startled or astonished that he had never seen Agnes in just that light before. She could fix her gaze upon her victim, and with the "silent smile of slow disparagement" make her conscious of a perfection of disadvantage which no words could express. No spirit, not even the bravest, is finally proof against the constant stings of gnat-like remarks. The soul that can face the fiercest assault undismayed sinks helpless under minute but perpetual torture. Agnes inherited intense moral courage, though she did

not know it. She was ignorant of her own forces, had not learned how to use them. She was still more ignorant of the force that overpowered her, but she was conscious to the utmost how often she was tormented and wretched. With this consciousness, for an instant she would feel that she hated Linda. But then she did not. "How can I?" she would ask; "I must forgive Linda's way, she means to be so kind." Of how much care she relieved her in her present weak state, and what lovely little things she did for her! She cut the most delicate flowers and set them on Agnes' table; went into the kitchen and prepared with her own hands some dainty dish to tempt Agnes' capricious appetite; relieved Agnes by the hour of the care of little Cyril. Then how utterly, how devotedly she loved little Cyril and big Cyril! was she not mother, sister, all to *him*, when he needed mother and sister most? Agnes would not forget these things; she could not hate Linda. "Yet why does she make me so unhappy?" she would sigh hopelessly.

Thus, when she needed favorable conditions most, to help her to regain her lost strength, she lived in a state of mental and spiritual conflict which consumed her vitality and made recuperation impossible, and all the more because the conflict went on in her own brain and heart in silence.

CHAPTER VII.

A JOURNEY.

"It is not a matter of mere personal preference, but a choice between life and death. Which do you choose? Absence from your child for a few weeks, or a final parting from him in this world, when you have had him but a few months? I am convinced there is no help for you except in an utter freedom from care, and a change in your mental condition, which can only be brought about by a change in the conditions of your daily life. Leave your baby with your cousin. Go with your husband, if you don't stay away more than a week ; even one, in such a place, with him, will give you new life. Do as I say, and I am perfectly certain that when you get back, you will come straight to me and thank me for having made you do it."

This was good Doctor Bache's little speech to Agnes, one July day. Doctor Bache was the most successful medical practitioner, not only in Lotusport, but in all the country round it. Like many another unpretending man in his exalted profession, his personal attainments and power far transcended his fame. He was intuitively a psychologist, as more or less all men must be who are preëminent as physicians. He was as conscious of psychical, as he was conversant with phys

ical laws, and in his final judgment of a case never separated the action and reaction of the two. According to purely physical laws, Agnes, a young woman of delicate but singularly healthy organism, should be, if not strong, nevertheless a well woman by this time. Instead, her child, who had inherited her constitution, in defiance of torturing teeth and midsummer heat, held his little own, and seemed to be taking a sure hold of life, while his mother, without a discernible cause, was as surely letting it go. Doctor Bache felt perfectly sure that she had no organic disease, and equally sure that her vital power was ebbing very low. A man quite as scientific and less intuitive would have begun to "build her up" on various tonics compounded of iron, cinchona, arsenic, and their kin. But Doctor Bache decided upon a tonic of a different sort.

"King, you must take your wife away. She is utterly unable to nurse her child. She must have a change of scene and of life," said the doctor to Cyril one day, when he encountered that gentleman on the village street, just returning from the city.

"That's my intention," was the answer, "and has been ever since her sickness. I'm only waiting till after Class Day, when I deliver the oration at my university. Then I shall have my month's vacation, and take her."

"Mind you take nobody else, not even the child. She can do it no good at present, and it may do her great harm. Let me tell you, King, she *can't* bear it. If you want to keep her, make it your special business at present to take care of her. Of course I know you do. But you don't know how very weak she is."

"Why, I know she is far from strong," said Cyril the tides of blood rushing to his heart, leaving his face deathly pale. "But you alarm me, doctor; what do you mean?"

"I don't want to alarm you, and I only mean to set you on the track of the sure remedy. Take your wife out to nature, live your honey-moon over with her, and you will bring her back a new woman. If you don't, she will die. Good day."

"I've fixed *that*," said the old doctor, striking his cane down, and speaking out in a tone of deep satisfaction, as he passed on, but not till he had seen Cyril pass through his own gate with a look of meaning and resolution on his face not to be mistaken.

Dr. Bache had already made his little speech to Agnes. Before he made it he had come to some very positive conclusions in his own mind. One was that Agnes' low state of physical health was the result of spiritual and mental distress; another was that the third member of the household was in no small share the cause, directly or indirectly, of so much mental trouble.

It was a mixed feeling that Linda aroused in the keen-visioned, true-hearted doctor. It was a mixed feeling that she aroused in everybody who in any degree fathomed her. He pitied her that her unusual powers should have such scanty scope, but while he pitied he distrusted, and armed himself against her. Personally her sinuous ways, her insinuating speech, even her little feminine gasps and sighs directed at him, glanced back from a coat of mail proof against her keenest assault.

"No, young woman," he said to himself, "I will

never be your confidant, nor you mine. My opinion is, that the baby is the only one in this family that you will not harm, and you will him if he lives long enough. I'm sorry for you. There is the making in you of a better woman. But under present conditions you are none the less dangerous for that. I shall prescribe for my patient an antidote against you."

Agnes, with constantly failing strength, saw not only the cares but the honors of her household slipping silently, insidiously, but surely, day by day, out of her hands into the hands of Linda. Had she been stronger and of a different nature she might have broken into open revolt. As it was at present, she had no appeal and no redress.

She could not complain to Cyril. Did he not see that Linda's attentions to his wife and child were assiduous and unceasing, that she was all kindness and devotion to Agnes herself?

Agnes finding fault with Linda would have seemed to Cyril the very essence of ingratitude. Besides, Linda had his ear, a never-failing receptacle into which to pour every thought and word which she chose to utter. Had she not had it all his life, and what man is proof (even though he may love another) against the woman who daily filters through his ears the inmost devices of her soul, through a flow of speech, enticing, soothing, and feeding to his own self-love? When in all probability the man knows the woman to be devoted to himself, even if he suspects she is a foe to the woman dearest to him, he is never wholly proof against her ever undermining influence.

He may say "nay," and honestly; no less she is a

power in his life. So when Linda, in the frequent lapses between the copying, murmured to him of Agnes' childlikeness and weakness and sickness as reasons why she, Linda, should do thus or thus — if Cyril paused in his pursuits to ponder at all on what she said, it was only to say to himself, "How good Linda is to Agnes, after all that she has cost her, poor girl! Linda is really more thoughtful and affectionate toward Agnes, than Agnes is toward Linda." He did not go on to inquire why it was that Agnes never stood positively faulty before him save after one of Linda's aside conversations with himself. What he was conscious of was that Linda praised Agnes. This was the positive quality of her converse. Her detractions, ever implied and insinuated, escaped his attention, while they impressed his mind and left their influence. According to his nature he loved Agnes more than he loved Linda, but she did not influence him more. Linda had had his ear and been a power in his life ever since he was born. She was not likely to grow less of one now that she possessed the immense advantage of daily contact, and the boundless opportunity of perpetual whispering. He was by no means a slow reader of men, but this woman, who, in a sense, was a part of himself, he could not hold far enough from his own consciousness to see her in her true proportions. I am sorry if you think him altogether selfish. He had no intention of being wholly self-absorbed. His intention was to be a very good sort of a fellow. He intended also to be a very devoted husband, and no man could have more tender thoughts or feelings for his wife, than filled his mind

and heart — at some times. This was one of them, when with Doctor Bache's verdict pervading him wholly, with a palpitating heart and eager-beating pulses, he rushed three steps at a time up-stairs to Agnes' room.

"My darling," he said, "you are not to say a word about baby. You are going with me; Doctor Bache says you must; that if you do, you will come back as strong as ever you were. To think my little girl should be sick so long!"

The last words were uttered in a tone of inexpressible tenderness, as he put his arms around her and drew her head to his breast. The words and the action were so sudden, so unexpected, so unwonted now, Agnes did what any loving woman, no stronger, and amid the same conditions, would have done — she wept for joy.

"There, I wouldn't cry any more," as he looked down and saw the tears still flowing, though without a sound. "I agree with Linda; you *do* cry too much. It keeps you from getting your strength, — and, Aggie, you don't look pretty when you cry; no woman does outside of a novel. And you know I want you always to look pretty."

"Oh, Cyril; I was never pretty. You knew that when you married me."

"No, I didn't; I never saw a woman more beautiful than you *can* be, if you would only stay so."

"You don't know how much I wish I could, for your sake. Your wife should be very beautiful, Cyril."

"Linda says so; strange you both should say the same thing for once, and both nonsense this time. All I want of you now is to get well — and you are going to do so. What a time we shall have at Tarnstone, the

world forgetting, by the world forgot! It won't tire you an atom to get ready; you won't need any clothes there,—any new ones, I mean. The oration next Wednesday, then we will be off."

It was natural for Agnes to rely upon authority and to obey. When Cyril joined Doctor Bache, and both assured her that for her child's sake she must go, that for the present little Cyril was better off with Linda than he could be with herself, she resolved to go without a murmur. It cost her more than one pang, the thought of leaving him, of leaving him with Linda, yet mixed with this was a feeling of thankfulness that she could commit him to such sure and loving hands.

Cyril did not overestimate the reception of his oration. It was duly reported with the other class and commencement orations of July, and copied from the metropolitan journals into the *Lotusport Argus*, with editorial comments which called upon the denizens of that sleepy port to awaken to the fact that they had "a rising man in their midst," adding finally that "any town might well be proud that could claim so young a man of promise among its permanent citizens." In the fulness of such applause, and the exhilaration caused by it, Cyril started for his summer vacation accompanied by Agnes. The young mother strained her eyes to catch one more sight of her boy. The last glimpse that she had of him was from the carriage as it turned in the avenue, when she saw him held aloft in Linda's arms on the piazza. All her own pain was forgotten in the sight of Linda's loving care for her child. Thus as she passed beyond sight her last thought of Linda was one of gratitude.

What a journey was that to one who had seen so little of this fair earth, yet who was born its lover. What gleams of beauty came to her through the windows of the rushing rail cars in that two days' ride! First, the long reach of the Sound, with its far-off sails, its iridescent waves reflecting the splendor of midsummer skies, the sentinel light-houses on their lonely reefs, the wash of waters on the shells and pebbles of the beach; then the contrasting land: cottages buried in bloom; apples reddening in wayside orchards; grapes purpling in the sun; populous towns cut in acute angles lined with dapper houses, redeemed from irredeemable ugliness by the grace of shading trees; then the New England which she had often pictured and never seen: its patriarchal homesteads — those royal, square old houses, with wide hall in the middle and spacious rooms on either side; the immemorial elms which had held loving guard over so many generations of children's children, standing in the great green yards; and along the foot-worn, grassy streets, the smart little houses, with their blinking blinds, and brave gardens all brightly bordered with marigolds, bachelor buttons, candy-tuft, and mignonnette, with dahlias filling their deep hearts with wine, and asters dipping their fringes into the intenser hues which were to add their variegated color to the halcyon August days, — their groups of sunflowers nodding to the sun from the little back yards, and innumerable hollyhocks, like so many gala flag-staffs set thick with rosettes of red and gold. Then she caught her first glimpse of the Connecticut sliding swiftly through its idyllic valley. She saw wide meadows dotted with dipping elms, and cattle lying

under them or drinking on the river's brink, fields of corn tossing their pale green tassels, and the tobacco spreading over acres its broad, aromatic leaves and cups of gold. Mount Tom and Mount Holyoke stood sentinels amid their historic villages. And farther on, grand Ascutney looked down upon an incomparable landscape of river, village, wood, and hill. Agnes was not weary of seeing when she caught the gleam of the Franconia range, notching with opaline scallops the far, blue sky. Then the cars bore her into the valley of the wild Passumpsic. She saw mountains darkly blue, mountains purple as violets, mountains deeply green, all girdled with pines and firs; flickering shadows of clouds trailing over them, and long-winged birds hovering above their misty summits. Amid these mountains were set many gleaming lakes, while between them and beyond them stretched wide, sinuous valleys, mottled with dense forests, rich farms, and ample homes.

This was the land of the North, the land that Cyril sought, and that she so often had longed to see.

At the close of the second day of their journey, they paused beside a lake, and rested in a large public-house filled with summer visitors. No lake like this could be seen out of a Northern latitude. It had none of the sylvan warmth of the South. Even in the dazzling July atmosphere its waters were coldly blue, and it swept on with a masculine majesty inviolably its own. From her open window Agnes looked out upon its lovely but lonely shores, upon the steely shadows sweeping over the evergreen sides of a solitary mountain near, and remembering their picture it seemed to her that she was looking up at Ben Venue, and that

before her swept the dark waters of Loch Achray. But this was but a resting-place. Cyril had come in search of trout, not of scenery. There was not a brook in the woody country on the other side of the lake that he did not know, or that had not a most excellent reason for knowing him. Many a flower-like fish darting in and out of its mossy lair was born only for that little hook waiting so eagerly and impatiently in a cork in Cyril's pocket.

"I sent a message to Evelyn last night to come after us to-day, as you already seem so rested," said Cyril to Agnes, as they sat together on the hotel piazza after a two days' halt at the lake side. "When you see her you will see a character, an unadulterated native."

"When did you see her first, Cyril?"

"When I came up here four years ago with my chum, Dick Albro. He had relatives living in the neighborhood, who told him about the famous fishing at the Pinnacle. So we went there and found the fish, and Evelyn. She gave us lodging in her log hut, and took care of us for a week — a jolly week. I never enjoyed myself more in my life. Such fishing, and such eating! Ever since, I've wanted to get back. I hope you will enjoy it, Aggie, if you don't look like a pioneer."

"Which? The fishing, or the eating?"

"Both. Do you think you could put a worm on a hook?"

"I know I couldn't — I mean, I know I wouldn't want to put one on."

"Very well! Then you shall sit in Evelyn's back

window and look at me put on hundreds, and see me pull them up by the hundred, — I mean the trout. How you'll scream out when you see an old one, one of last year's chaps, jerked up curling and flapping in the air. I'll let you come and sit in the boat with me, if you will promise not to cry out when it dips, and so scare the trout away."

"No, I won't cry out. Sailing on the Sound cured me of that, you know. I'm sure I shan't be scared on a little lake, if the boat does dip."

"But if you should speak out suddenly, it would scare them. You never saw anything so scarey as a trout. I shall try you once, though, in the boat, and if you do well you may go out on the lake every time that I do. But if here isn't Evelyn already!"

And Agnes, looking up, saw that their childish chatter was interrupted by the coming into the piazza of one whom she decided at once looked like an "old girl." That is, the lines of her face indicated that she must have lived some forty years, but her eyes possessed the vivacity of expression which belongs to early youth. They were full of dancing rays of light, which in a few rare natures go out only with life, and her brown hair fell in rather thin ringlets around her neck. The color of her eyes was a light, limpid hazel. Eyes and mouth laughed together, the latter revealing in the process two rows of white, unbroken teeth, nature's own. Her skin, naturally fair, was browned by out-of-door exposure, and so were her hands, which were enlarged at the joints, and hardened as if by out-of-door labor. She wore a short, freshly "done-up" calico dress, a black alpaca apron, and a wide-rimmed straw hat tied under her chin with strings of brown ribbon.

CHAPTER VIII.

TARNSTONE PINNACLE.

“**MY!** Mister Cyril, how you’ve growed!”

This was the first exclamation of the new-come, as with arms a-kimbo she halted half-way to contemplate Cyril before coming up to shake hands with him.

“Yes, Evelyn, I’ve grown bigger and older, but you haven’t an atom.”

“No, I reckon not,” with a bright, approving glance at Agnes.

“Mrs. King, Mrs. Dare. Agnes, this is the good friend you have heard me speak of so often. Evelyn, I am going to turn Mrs. King over to you entirely, for the next four weeks. I believe that your care, and your cooking, and your company, will do more for her than all the doctoring in creation.”

“I shouldn’t wonder. I’ve lost faith in doctors myself since poor Mimy died. But has Mister King told you what an awful lonesome place I live in? Reckon ’twill be too dumb fur ye. if you’re city-bred. ’Twas fur Mis’ Dickens. She was from Bostin. Jes’ cum out a day with her husband. He wanted to fish in the pond. She was dressed so fine, and had on sech long flounced skirts and sech thin kid shoes she couldn’t tech the ground, an’ didn’t want to, in my opinion. ’Twa’n’t strange she couldn’t feel to hurn in my little

place. She jerked on the little rocking-chair by the winder as if she thought the seat was hard, and bobbed her head when she stood up as if she thought the rafters would strike her topknot off — never seed such a topknot in my life, except in the pictur's at Squire Monteith's, an' I told her so, an' she didn't seem to like it. She flushed up red, though I meant it for a compliment. I told her every interesting thing I knowed about all the folks around. Of course I had to talk of what I knowed; I never could make up talk out of what I don't know. She wa'n't interested a *mite*, not even in Isabella Monteith, and she's jest as good as a novel, any day. 'Twa'n't no use! I can't make no company of no sech folks. My! Mister Cyril, jest *you* think! she actelly stuck up her nose at *my* dinner! though I'd cooked many a dinner for quality at Squire Monteith's sech as she could never think of bein'. 'Twas the forks — the steel forks — that turned her stomic. 'She couldn't tech steel to her lips,' she said, and of course a steel knife was wuss. 'Horrible! horrible!' she said. I made up my mind I'd have no more 'horribles' from nobody, so I worked like a bounden slave at the Corners to get some silver forks, silver-coated, I mean; they are jest as good till the coatin' washes off. I guess Mis' Dickens was glad enough when night cum, but she warn't no gladder than I was, I can tell ye."

"*You* don't look a mite like Mis' Dickens, my dear," in an assuring tone to Agnes.

"I am glad enough of that," said Agnes, the tears rolling down her cheeks from laughter, evoked less by Evelyn's words than by her dramatic delivery, **her**

dancing eyes, and wild, graceful gestures. The combination was more inimitably comical than anything Agnes had ever seen before in her life.

"You see that I am short," she said, "so I can never strike your rafters. I've no fine clothes to spoil. I wear thick boots out of doors, where I mean to stay all day when it don't rain, and I think I shall be hungry enough to eat whatever you set before me, with whatever forks you choose to give me. And as for nice stories about people I don't know, and never saw, I can't tell you how much I enjoy them," enthusiastically; "they're better than tiring one's eyes reading a story book."

"That's what I call sensible," said Evelyn, in intensely approving tones. "But I knowed you was sensible the minnit I sot my eye on you — and sensible wimen-folks, city-bred, are mighty scarce, accordin' to my experience and thinkin'. But then I knowed, afore I saw you, that Mister Cyril would never marry none of sech simperin' sozzle-tails as I see here at the Lake every summer, and even over to the Corners."

"I think we had better be starting," said Cyril, who had just touched the cork and fish-hooks in his pocket, and felt as if he could not wait another minute. "I want Agnes to see the country by daylight, and we must reach the Pinnacle before sunset. It would be too chilly for Agnes in the woods afterwards."

"Well, I done jest as you told me," said Evelyn, "stopped at the Corners and got Hi's old chaise. 'Tain't to be compared with my spring wagon, for my ridin', but I reckon the back seat wil be easier for Mis' King. The top's down, and you can view the landscape o'er to yer heart's content."

The payment of bill, and gathering of "traps," as Evelyn called Cyril's and Agnes' two stout valises, occupied but a very few moments. Then the old chaise sallied forth — Cyril and Agnes on the back seat, Evelyn on an improvised seat before, jerking the reins of her nag with one hand, and brandishing a long branch with a few quivering leaves on the end, in the other.

The landscape gave to Agnes the pleasure of perpetual surprise. She had never seen anything like the great hop-fields before, save the pictures of vineyards in Southern France. In nature she had never beheld any such combination as these broad rolling plains, blue scintillant lakes, and evergreen mountains. The road ran through fruitful fields, almost ripe for harvest, through groves of sugar maples which seemed to say, "How is our little Agnes!" they were so like the maples of old Ulm, under which she played, a little girl. Then there were wonderful woody passes, where the road narrowed into a lane, its high banks interlaced from tree to tree with wild honeysuckle and woodbine, the latter waving little pennons of vivid crimson set amid its green. Here and there a scarlet leaf fluttered like a beckoning hand far up in the emerald tree boughs, while below by some roadside brook the gentian was weaving its pale purple fringes for the near August days, and hosts of golden-rod, marshalled by the way, tossed their green lances, and dipped their yellowing plumes in deeper sunshine. They crossed a wild river rushing with impetuous speed through cliff and fell, and ascending a hill came out upon a high, broad plain, and into a wide, straight street at least two

miles in length. It looked like one long town street left alone with nature. It was lined with pretty cottages half buried in trees and flowers, with here and there a church, mostly old and mossy; but one stately, and of stone, rose up proud as a minster. It had its handsome mansions standing amid "grounds," its "business part," and ended at last in Evelyn's famous "Corners," from whence four roads diverged, and where stood Hi' Sanderson's famous hostel. Back of this populous street the great plain stretched away into the silence of remote farms, to the sheen of lakes set like shields between the hills, and to the proud mountain range which bound its horizon, and rose like an outermost wall between it and the sky.

"Tain't likely you realize that you have left your own country, but you have," said Evelyn, sententiously. "You left it in the middle of the Jimtoby River. You are in the Dominion. In the municipality of Dufferin, in Dufferin Street, and in the Province of Quebec. There! I've said all that over often enough to myself to get it straight this time."

"I can't realize it, that we are in any country but our own," said Agnes.

"Well, you air. I am in my own, but you ain't in your own. You're in Queen Victory's. I know how you feel. I did jes' the same when I cum to live in the Dominion. I was born jes' t'other side of the line; far enough in, though, to be a Yankee through and through. My Thomas was born this side, and my boys — I can't go agin *their* country, so I'm divided, like, in my feelin's. I'm not dead agin the queen. All I have agin her is that it should take so much more to support

her and her children than it does any other woman and her family. If good things could be divided more ekally, it 'ud be a good deal more satisfyin'; but I suppose they can't. An' I'm sure our queen is a good woman accordin' to her bringin' up. Somehow I've got it in my head that she's a feelin' heart for poor folks. She oughter. Mercy knows, her own father was poor enough. She couldn't pay his debts in a minute. An' when I go over to Montreal, and see her stan' in Victory Square large as life and made of marble, holdin' a sceptre and wearin' a crown, it makes me feel good — I kinder like it, to know that one woman is a queen, seein' so many wimen have to dig and scrub, and be beasts of burden, as they do in Austrey. My! to think of bein' yoked to a cow! A woman!" and in the dire vehemence of such a thought Evelyn brought her birch bough down with such violence that she broke it, and frightened her horse into a frantic gallop.

"Come, now, Johnny, you needn't take it so to heart, ef I did hit you a lick when I didn't know it. You shall have an extra pint of oats for that, Johnny. Come, now!" and standing up, Evelyn essayed between jerks and cajoling to bring the refractory John back to peace and his original jog-trot.

Between laughter and fright Agnes was highly excited, but finally tranquillity was restored, when Cyril asked, —

"How are you so well acquainted with women in Austria, Evelyn? You have never been there!"

"Hevn't I though! I've been there more'n once. I take the 'Weekly Tribune,' and mean to take it as

long as I live. Besides, I've read heaps about different countries out of books — them's the books I like. That's the way I travel. Miss Isabella taught me to read, an' I had all the books I wanted when I was at Squire Monteith's. I borrow round now. They're all willin' to lend me books, for they all know I won't lend 'em double, and I'll send 'em back clean as when I got 'em. That's sumthin' to folks as care fur their things, nowadays, when people hain't no more conscience about borrowed books than they have about borrowed umberills."

"It seems to me, Evelyn, the Castle begins to look dilapidated," said Cyril. "It has run down sadly since I saw it four years ago."

"Dear suz me, that's so," answered Evelyn, with a deep sigh. "But there's nuthin' else to be 'spected, with Miss Isabella dead, an' the place waitin' for executers to sell it for debts. It's enough to make her bust her coffin-lid off, ef she knows how they're puttin' white paint on her beautiful gimcrack work 'in native wood,' as she used to say in her soft, lady voice. Dear me! It seems as if I heard her sayin' it now. The days and the years that she spent on that gimcrack work, makin' designs, and drawin's, and dia— somethin's. Why, she'd spend a year on jest the top of a pillar — only to have it all daubed over now with white paint as thick as molasses."

The eyes of the three were turned toward a lofty building on a high plateau of ground above the road, commanding a view of the entire street, and, from its sides and rear, of the magnificent sweep of meadow, wood, and river, with the great blue lake flashing in the

distance through the open hills, and of mountains merging into the sky above and beyond. It was more than a villa and less than a castle, a poetic, Gothic combination of both. There was a fountain whose open-mouthed dolphin in the uplifted hands of a marble Nereid no longer tossed spray on the elm-shaded lawn which stretched up from the road, and great parterres of flowers on its southern side which seemed to be blooming in untrained and uncared-for luxuriance.

"She made and built it all out of her own head, poor Miss Isabella ! To think on't, an' what has cum of it, jes' makes me sick every time I go by," exclaimed Evelyn.

"Did a lady design and build this house?" asked Agnes, her eyes filled with sympathy and interest; "this Miss Isabella? Who was she? Do tell us of her, please."

"There ! I knowed you wa'n't a mite like Mis' Dickens ! No more you ain't !" exclaimed Evelyn triumphantly. "An' to think of sech as her stickin' up her nose at my forks and at me ! when I almost growed up with real quality, an' if not in that house, in the one afore it !

"That's the way I cum by my fine name : I was named for Lady Monteith. Her name was Evelyn Stuart. Her grandfather was one of the Scottish Chiefs ; her father wore the Stuart tartan ; many a time she teld me that when I was a little girl. My mother was born on t'other side of the line, but she lived off an' on at Squire Monteith's after she was married. Miss Isabella and I were born the same year, I a few months afore her, and we played together under those

big trees when we were jes' specs, when Miss Isabella hadn't half as much notion of buildin' as of flyin'."

"Why was her mother called Lady Monteith?" asked Agnes inquiringly. Her American mind not adjusting itself readily to English titles when she was not more than half a mile and fifteen minutes beyond the boundary of her native States. "You say Squire Monteith and Lady Monteith. Was she really a lady of title by birth?"

"Indeed was *she*! She cum from the kings of Scotland," said Evelyn, growing more magnificent in her memories of the Stuarts as she went on. To be sure her father was a younger son, and wild, and was sent to the Dominion, where the great families in the old country send all their wild ones. He never had no title, but his brother had, that stayed to him in Scotland. Lady Monteith had no title *really*, but she looked jes' born to it. Sech 'a lady, Dufferin Street never saw afore or sence! Sech brocades and velvets and satins as she used to wear day in an' out, an' sech laces, finer than the spiders spin in my cherry-tree. An' sech a low voice. The older I growed the of'ener she would say to me, 'Evelyn, you strike me through and through, with your high, thin, American voice. Can't you speak a *little* lower? Try now! not away up in the air like a katy-did, but down in your chest.' 'Twa'n't no use! 'Twa'n't in my grain, you see. I've gone on screechin' an screamin' an' hollerin' all my life, as Lady Monteith would 'a' done if she'd had to live in the woods like me, with not even a tin horn when I fust went there, to call the men in to dinner!

"You asked about Squire Monteith?"

“He warn’t her ekel — not in blood nor breedin’ as he proved to everybody’s knowledge more’n once. Miss Isabella was all in all to her mother. But if ever a human bein’ had a tug an’ a tussle jest to live in this world, that bein’ was Isabella Monteith. You see she had genus, and that by all accounts is the most oncomfortable thing a creeter can have, and most of all a woman. Times are changin’, an’ ll change more, I guess, if I read the signs right. But what chance did a woman genus have away up here North, thirty year ago? None, I tell ye. If she was a lady she liad to read an’ write an’ cipher; to embroider an’ to dance an’ to speak French, if her folks didn’t despise the natives; but her genus had no more chance than a cat, nor half so much, for there’s no hamper on my Jerry’s genus for eatin’ up birds and squirrels, or even poor Polly’s little kittens.

“Fust, Miss Isabella wanted to be an artist, an’ her mother taught her drawin’. That didn’t satisfy her, she must be a sculptress, an’ went to Montreal to study. When she cum back she spent most of her time put-terin’ in soft clay and sech stuff — mod’lin’, she called it — plaster images. I was cook at Monteith House then. One day she modelled me. I lived through it, but I smashed the image the first chance I got, an’ never told Miss Isabella, who didn’t know it till long after she got to be an architec’; then, you see, she didn’t care a pin. She went to Europe with her mother, whose cousin was a lord; ‘Lord of the Isles was he,’ I used to sing. He lived in the castle where all the great Stuart chiefs had lived afore him.

“Well, that Stuart castle and t’others that Miss Isa

nella see just driv' her wild. She studied architecturin' in Edinburgh and London, an' cum home thinkin' the Dominion wa'n't fit to live in. She'd quit sculpturin', an' now nuthin' would do but she must build a castle. Well, she built it, an' trouble enough cum of it. It tuk her a dozen years or more. The biggest walnut and butternut trees on the farm were cut down to go into it; native wood was brought from Scotland. An' oh the time spent designin', inlayin', and polishin' that gim-crack work! And the cost! Long afore it was done the Monteith farm was mortgaged for a'most as much as it was wuth, and the fust thing Lady Monteith did after gettin' into the splendid rooms Miss Isabella made a purpose for her, was to die. That a'most broke Miss Isabella's heart, for the world never saw a better daughter. She was doctor, nuss, and daughter all in one. Now *will* you believe it! Lady Monteith hadn't been dead, no, not two months, when one day Miss Isabella cum home from a walk and found in her mother's parlor Nancy Trig, the housemaid, a-sittin' in the window in Lady Monteith's silver gray brocade an' scarlet Indy scarf.

"Nancy! how dare you! Walk out of my sight and take off that dress!' said Miss Isabella.

"Walk out of *my* sight yoursel', said Nancy. 'You'll take on no more gran' airs to *me*, Miss Isabella. I'm lady here now; this is *my* dress, and *my* parlors. I married your pa this mornin'. What have you to say to *that*?' "

"I had nothin' to say to such a person,' Miss Isabella said to me afterwards. She never entered that room ag'in — the room in which her own mother died

— but once; that was after the squire had to leave the Castle. Nancy Trig is living yet, but not his widdler no, indeed. The old squire warn't much more 'n cold afore she married Pete Lifoot, one on her own kind, Hi Sanderson's hostler. The squire never 'd a had her, only she was young and rosy as a pippin — and she got roun' him a-nussin' on him when he was swearin' and tearin' with the rheumatiz. There's no end o' men that's taken in by nussin'.

“Miss Isabella left the Castle that had cost her so much, an' went to live at old Doctor Dalton's. She'd always fancied doctorin' a'most as much as sculpturin', and had studied off an' on with the old doctor sence she was a young gal. All Dufferin said she was crazy, but the old doctor, who was famous in these parts, told her not to mind, that she'd brains enough to make a dozen doctors if she'd only pin 'em to doctorin' an' let sculpturin' an' architecturin' alone.

“‘I'll do it now, Evelyn,’ she said, an' she did. ‘I must do sumthin' to earn me money, for all my fortin' is in the Castle,’ she said, an' she did. After she finished at Montreal she went to Bostin an' opened an infirmary that was makin' her famous, but it killed her — I mean 'twas the last stroke. She was the kindest-hearted creetur! My! at an hour's notice she would get up theatricals or call in the young folks an' set 'em to dancin', jest to see 'em havin' on a good time. She never minded no work or worry ef she could only make some one happy. Of'en enuff 'twas jest some one who laughed at her fur her pains, an' called her ‘cracked,’ cause she could do things no other woman could or ever thought of doin'.

“ The squire had to let the Castle at last to some folks from Bostin, an’ he and Nancy Trig went to live in the farm-house. The Castle was let, carved furniture an’ all ; but afore the folks cum in it fur the summer Miss Isabella cum up to take a last look, she said. One day she sot hours an’ hours in her mother’s room, all alone. The day afore she went back she cum out to the Pinnerkel to see me. Never seed such a change in any one in all my life. Her hair was as white as the driven snow, an’ she wa’n’t forty. Her face was as smooth as a baby’s, but there wa’n’t no more color in it than in Queen Victory’s marble statur, an’ her eyes looked twice as big as they ever looked afore. We sot down on the door-step an’ talked over old times — back to when we both got into the big chiny crate in Monteith House garret an’ hunted pieces for doll-baby clothes in the paper rags, an’ screeched so at last fur the nuss to pull us out (for the crate was higher’n our heads) everybody down-stairs was scared jest about to pieces. I ain’t settin’ myself on an ekality with Miss Isabella — that couldn’t be ; but in one way we were sort o’ sisters, for we half growed up together. When we’d talked everything over, she jest sot an’ thought till she bust out : ‘ You’re happier’n me, Evelyn. If you do live in a log-house, it’s yourn, an’ paid for, an’ home. An’ no matter what anybody thinks or sez about you outside, you’ve got the two Toms to love you, an’ Vittle Jim. Look a’ me, Evelyn ; you’ll never know how hard it is for a woman, any woman if she has a heart, to knock about the world alone ; nor how hard, no matter what you give or suffer, to know that there ain’t nothin’ flowin’ back of love to feed the spring ; an’

if there ain't, there ain't nothin' left in the world wuth livin' for, Evelyn.'

"So you see sculpturin' an' architecturin' an' doctorin' all put together wa'n't no comfort to her in the long run, though she did a heap of good with the last, that I know. I, born to poverty an' a log-house, was better off an' happier 'n her with 'em all. She jes' laid her poor white head on my shoulder an' cried, an' I cried. 'If wust comes to wust,' I said, 'an' you hain't got nothin' more satisfyin', you know, Miss Isabella, I allus loved you an' allus shall, an' I hain't nothin' on earth that ain't yourn if you want it.' I never saw her ag'in. She went back, an' jest fainted an' died one day, worn out. An' she's buried away down there among strangers, an' I can't get at her grave to put arbutus on't, when she loved it so, an' was allus the fust to find it, an' Pinnerkel woods is full on't. But I told her I'd never forget her, an' I never will," said Evelyn with a deep sob. There were tears in Agnes' eyes, and a mist over Cyril's which showed that he felt the pathos of the story of this one human life, or at least Evelyn's dramatic rendering of it, which might have moved a much harder heart. "Mister John, you needn't stan' stunn' still if we be a-cryin'. We can be a-cryin' an' a-movin' on at the same time jest as well, I reckon," exclaimed Evelyn, giving John a jerk, that animal having come to a dead stop, as if in meditation over the story that he had just heard, although it was by no means the first time that he had listened to it.

They left Dufferin Street and its busy Corners far behind, and turned into the open country, facing southwards. Distant mountains still notched the horizon,

while nearer, directly facing them, on the other side of a dense forest, one shot up into the blue air as abruptly as a tower. It seemed like an immense evergreen shaft with a cone-like summit all pointed with pines.

"How are you, old Pinnacle?" exclaimed Cyril at the first sight of it, taking off his hat and waving it enthusiastically; "many's the day since I saw you; but you're as green and fresh as ever, and I know the old Tarn is as still and deep and full of black trout as it was four years ago!"

"That it is," said Evelyn, "an' no other man shall have the boat, now you have come, Mister Cyril."

The farms which they passed were large and the houses sparse; these grew fewer and more remote, till they entered the forest.

"Guess ye think it's pretty humpty-dumpty, don't ye?" inquired Evelyn, amused at Agnes' little starts when the old chaise gave a jump or a lurch. "Dun know what ye'd 'a' thought when Thomas an' me first came to the Pinnerkel, more 'n twenty year ago. Then there wa'n't no road 't all. A tuggin' time we had afore we got one. Sech trees as had to be laid low! Poor Thomas! They laid him low at last, the strain they gi'n him. The road ort to be splendid, an' we think 'tis, now. It cost enuff, the Lord in heaven knows."

"Don't be afeared!" watching Agnes' face; "John knows every spec of this road from one end to t'other. He wouldn't hit agin a stump if he walked it all with his eyes shet. Las' Saturday it was midnight when I got here from the Corners. The woods were jest as black as pitch, an' I had a reapin' machine in the back

of the waggin. 'Tain't no use, I said to John, a-tryin to drive ye. You know better 'n me. Go on, old boy ! an' he did. I jes' laid the reins in my lap — couldn't see my hand afore my face. An' John jes' brought me straight through, reapin' machine an' all, an' landed us at the door slick as a whistle."

"But were you not frightened?" asked Agnes.

"No, child! I dun know what it is to be afeared of the woods. Nothin' never skeers me unless I hear another waggin behind. Then it's my conscience, I guess, fur I'm allus afeared it's a revenue officer arter my smugglin's."

"Your what!" exclaimed Agnes, while Cyril burst into a laugh.

"My smugglin's. We're all smugglers up here 'a the border, more or less."

For the first time Agnes gave a disapproving glance at Evelyn. To her a smuggler was only less dreadful than a pirate. Smuggling in her mind was associated with black caves and deeds of darkness.

Was it to a smuggler's den that she was being carried through these out-of-the-way woods? But in an instant Evelyn's open, sunny glance restored her startled faith.

"Don't take it so to heart. I don't make a business on it," laughed Evelyn. "I'll tell ye how 'tis. When I take butter 'n' eggs 'n' cheese down to the Lake, and see thar some calaker or green tea or fact'ry cotton that I like, I jest buy 'em, pay all they ask for 'em, put em in my waggin, and bring 'em hum jest as I would from the Corners. But jest 'cause they cum from the Lake an' don't cum from the Corners, it's smugglin'. It a revenue officer overtook me and searched my waggin

he could make me pay duty on my traps. If I didn't, he'd take 'em. But as I allus pay all they're wuth in the fust place, I can't stop to mince matters with one gov'er'ment or t'other. I jest bring 'em straight along, an' I've never bin stopped yet. But I've thought I were goin' to be more 'n once. One black night in the middle of the woods, I heered a waggin jest forrid of me, an' the man in it heered a waggin jest behind him. He thought I was a custom-house officer an' I thought he was one. Both thought the other was after t'other. He dashed his hoss on, an' his hoss knowed nothin' about the road, compared with John. So he jest shyed into one of those air side slumps. 'Twa'n't no easy matter gettin' out, an' custom-house officer or no custom-house officer, a man in trouble is a man in trouble ; so I jumped out to help him back his buggy. His hoss was a-thrashin', an' he a-jerkin', for he didn't darst to open his mouth. I would know who it was, an' jest held my lantern up to his face to see; and didn't I holler? Why, 'twas only Sam Jug, who lives t'other side of the Pinnerkel, and he'd come this way so not to meet nobody.

“ ‘ You must have an extry load on to-night, Sam,’ I said, as I give his buggy a boost. ‘ Go in peace. If you don't tell, I shan't.’ So ye see our smugglin' ain't so awful ; but we all smuggle jest the same, we border folks. There's Mis' Harris ; she smuggles under her beautiful kerridge seat, an' she is jest as perfect a sreetur' as the Lord ever made. I wouldn't have my chance of heaven better 'n hern — ef I could.”

They emerged from the woods at last, and there waited Cyril's land of Beulah. Before them stretched

the little farm which Thomas and Evelyn Dare had spent all the life of their manhood and womanhood in "clearing." Now its fields of wheat and rye, of corn and barley, intermingled with patches of potatoes and turnips, of pumpkins and squashes, stretched away to the westward woods whose primeval beauty the toil of their owners had never touched. Between these fields and the woods which our travellers had just left was the pasture, wherein native elm and maple, beech and butternut trees stood out from the evergreen background of the forest with its graceful tamaracks, sombre pines, fragrant hemlocks, fringing cedars, and balsamic firs. Cattle were grazing in this pasture, and at the sound of the wagon wheels a flock of sheep and lambs, which had been holding their noses together by a brook that ran through it, came rushing down to the fence, peeping through the bars and taking a deliberate look at the new-comers. The brook had its source in a spring which gushed up from between two great stones by the road. On the nearer side of it an open green space ran up to two log-houses, one of which seemed to be an appendage of the other. A large flat stone, deeply embedded in the sod, was the door-step to the larger house. On one side of it a sweetbrier bush had pushed its head far above the low window-sill; before the one on the other side, stood a group of stately tiger-lilies; while at the end of the house a mountain-ash laid its clusters of reddening berries upon the roof. Behind it were a few apple and cherry trees, and beyond these a garden, its jagged fence lined with currant and gooseberry bushes, and its long beds of vegetables brightened by occasional bunches of poppies,

marigolds, and dahlias, while hosts of tri-colored hollyhocks and sunflowers stood up like so many sentinels in the corners of the fences. On one side of the house was the forest : on the other a pond, narrow, but a mile in length ; a pond so deep, dark, and silent it was called the Tarn. Looking along its length to the northeastward, meadow land and one distant, solitary house were visible, while just opposite, throwing its deep shadow over it, towered high into mid-air the steep evergreen mountain, a land beacon for many miles away, Tarnstone Pinnacle. The sun had just gone down behind the western woods. Their emerald arches and flowering boughs were veined in exquisite tracery upon a background of gold glowing through their myriad vistas. The same transfiguring radiance gilded the old Pinnacle, till its firs and cedars seemed to be on fire ; it flushed warm and red the dark waters of the Tarn, and lit the little windows of Evelyn's log-house till they flashed with the splendor of an illuminated palace.

"How bright, how peaceful!" exclaimed Agnes.

"Hum is hum. You're welcome to the Pinnerkel. May I give ye a kiss, my dear? jest to begin with;" said Evelyn, as she halted at the door, and turning round kissed Agnes before proceeding to alight from her improvised perch in the front of the old chaise.

CHAPTER IX.

LIFE AT TARNSTONE.

IF Evelyn's log-house had been the castle, she could not have ushered her guests into it with a profounder air of satisfaction. She was as proud of its spotless walls, of its scoured floors and patch-work bedquilts, as Isabella Monteith ever could have been of her carved furniture and works of art. The front door opened directly into a large, square room—the spare room of the habitation. It had four windows: two looking out upon the grassy yard, the road, the farm, and the woods, and two looking back upon the orchard, the garden, the Tarn, and the Pinnacle. It also had manifold doors. One led to the orchard and garden, and a well worn path from it led down to the Tarn. Upon one side, two opened upon the bedrooms, whose gayly-decorated beds were visible from the sitting-room. On the opposite side its doors led into a spacious pantry, and a few steps down into an ample kitchen, whose burnished cook-stove was as great an object of pride to its polisher as were all her “Job’s patience” and other elaborately patterned bedquilts. A certain purity and freshness of cleanliness made the distinctive atmosphere of the room. The log walls were closely boarded, and these boards, from floor to ceiling, had been scoured to a whiteness and smooth-

ness which seemed to make the fact of universal dust impossible. No speck dared to adhere to its polished and creamy surface, and this was equally true of floor, chairs, and tables; all were alike free of paint and of blemish. The windows were ruffled with short white curtains, edged with fringe, and a small stand, holding a big Bible and hymn-book, wore the same garniture. Open pine shelves, of the same spotless texture as the walls, bore in clear sight Evelyn's household treasures. One contained piles of snowy bed and table linen and spare cotton garments, spotlessly washed and faultlessly ironed; the other held stray bits of old china, old books, and engravings, which Evelyn had gleaned in her life-time of occasional sojourns of service amid the "quality." The only article in the room which hinted of American luxury was the low wooden rocking-chair beside a back window, the rocking-chair which "Mis' Dickens" had so scornfully eschewed.

"This room is your'n!" said Evelyn, leading the way to the second of the side bedrooms.

Agnes' trained woman's eye saw at a glance that this room was all to Evelyn that her own pet room at Lotusport had been to her. Evelyn's untrained eyes, keenly perceptive by nature, discerned at once that the pet apartment was approved by the new-comer, and she was content.

The feather bed was covered with a "rising sun" bedquilt, the consummate triumph of Evelyn's patchwork art, where the cotton luminary, in waves of crimson and green, soared toward the high-piled pillows as toward a cloud of white. The full, white valances were fringed like the curtains, and on the spotless floor before

the bed was a large mat, braided by Evelyn's hands out of scraps gleaned from the immemorial china crate in Monteith House garret, and out of rags colored and patiently sewed together by her own fingers. A new, gayly painted cottage bureau stood against the partition which divided it from the adjoining sleeping apartment, and a similarly decorated little rocking-chair, with a cane seat, which had certainly made its advent since Mis' Dickens' day, stood beside the back window. There was also a new wash-stand, with fresh pitcher and basin of blue queen's-ware. The wooden walls were decorated with manifold pegs on which to hang garments, with a few colored prints, and an immense file of the "Weekly Tribune." The great Canada porcelain stove which warmed the sitting-room, thrusting its back through the wall (carefully protected with zinc), to give warmth to the winter air of the bedroom, served as a flower-stand now, surmounted with a huge pitcher filled with poppies, marigolds, larkspurs, bachelor-buttons, nasturtiums, and asparagus.

"Pretty nice for a log-house, ain't it?" asked Evelyn, with an approving smile and nod at her bedroom. "It is what Miss Isabella would call a *chief doover*; and it's all your'n while ye stay, jest as if ye was to home in your own house. You're hungry enuff, I reckon. I'll go and get yer supper in a whiffit."

In the long, mellow twilight Cyril wandered out, Evelyn said, "to see how the land lay," but actually to feast his eyes on the Tarn and to measure the capacity of the skiff by its side, and to fix upon a delectable spot out of which to dig worms for bait.

Agnes, all interest in everything around her, took a seat in the Mis' Dickens rocking-chair, and divided her attention between following Cyril along the edge of the Tarn, feasting her eyes on the glorious summit of the Pinnacle, and looking at Evelyn flying between the table that she was setting and the supper which she was cooking in the outer room, interspersing her labors with flighty snatches of rapid, disjointed conversation, like —

“This teapot Lady Monteith give me ; I'm going to make tea in it for you ; I don't very often for nobody, I can tell ye. It's a Stuart teapot. My ! the Scottish chiefs that have drank their tea out of it in their castle ! many's the time !

“‘The walls white !’ well they may be ; they give Mimy her death. I'll never be happy scrubbin' on 'em or lookin' at 'em ag'in !

“Mimy was my youngest sister, more my child, like. She caught a fever at Hi Sanderson's ; how, the Lord only knows, for the Corners is healthy. She cum home full of it ; to forget it she said she'd scrub every mite of the boardin'. She did, but 'twas the death on her. The brush jest dropped out of her hand, and she dropped on the bed, and never got off it ; not till we carried her off and laid her over yonder. I've seen the time when it seemed as if it would break my heart jest to look at these walls — an' I doubt if I can ever make 'em look right ag'in. Mimy died, then all on us took the fever, an' laid here dead sick together. Not one soul could do nothin' for t'other ; an' we were all snowed in, so the neighbors t'other side of the woods didn't know it.

“Then Thomas died” — a sob, and a long dive into the kitchen.

"Look a' here, you little Jim," to a small fac-simile of herself that moment appearing in the front door, in a blue smock and a pair of copper-toed boots; "look a' here, little Jim, this is Mis' King. Cum in like a gentleman, an' give her yer hand an' make a bow. My, you was such a speck when Mr. Cyril was here afore, ye don't remember him, an' he won't you; but jest you run out an' tell him who you air, an' then you show him that spot jest behind the pig-pen where the fattest worms be, — that's a sonny."

At last Agnes forgot to look at Cyril and the Pinnacle, she became so interested in the table-setting going on before her.

"'Spect ye think Lady Monteith give me this table-cloth too, but she didn't," pointing to one, fine and glossy as the most shining satin, which she had taken from the shelves by the wall. "I earnt it myself, an' the napkins, as well as the forks, at the Corners. Do you think Mis' Dickens would turn up her nose now? not but what I had good enuff, and too good, for her in her day. If she could see this, I guess she'd find out whether I know what real damask is when I see it. I hevn't lived with quality all my life with my eyes shet. Goodness gracious! if that ham ain't sizzlin' a'ready!" Another dive into the kitchen.

Agnes could not have been surprised if the appointments of the table had been rude and lacking nicety if not neatness; but in fact it was their purity and delicacy which astonished her. Yet the astonishment evoked by the table-setting was mild compared with that aroused by the supper itself. It outraged every law of dietetics and put to rout every acknowledged bond of consan-

guinity in food. Nevertheless it was a culinary triumph. The chickens, that had been started on their slow process of simmering before Evelyn set out for the Lake in the morning, were browned to perfection. Every "sliver" of hot broiled ham held a perfect egg, an amber globule trembling in its case of translucent pearl, and not one was broken. There were new potatoes bursting their jackets, that had not been out of the ground an hour; and sweet corn boiled on the cob, hot new beans, and cold sliced cucumbers. This astonishing combination was surrounded by the outworks of an equally astonishing dessert. It was built of mince pie, of fruit cake made the last Christmas, of hot drop cakes, creamy crullers, "riz" cake, cream pie, the richest cheese from Evelyn's dairy, preserved berries that she had picked from high up on the Pinnacle, cherries and plums from the trees behind the house, with — crown of all — hot flapjacks made of sour cream, eggs, soda, and flour, swimming in melted butter and maple molasses. Besides all these were biscuits smoking from the oven, and tea and coffee, half cream.

The supper was certainly "good" enough to have made her guests sick for a week. But happily Cyril had the digestion of an ostrich, and thus far in his life had been able to eat with impunity, while Agnes renewed her forces with the simplest dishes, amid the outcries and urging of Evelyn "jest to taste" everything that she had on the table.

"You can eat," she said approvingly to Cyril at the conclusion of the repast; "but you," to Agnes, "don't seem to hold no more'n a robin; but you will in a day or two, that's certain. All the city folk that cum an'

stay in this air, go away swelled to bustin , it gives 'em such an appetite." Tom, Evelyn's son of twenty, the farmer of her little estate, and little Jim, her darling, paid homage to their mother's cooking by hiding enormous quantities of it out of sight, while she made no attempt to eat at all, but spent her whole time flying between table and stove, banging oven doors, bringing in biscuit, and frying flapjacks and serving them at the table.

It took considerable time to gather up the *débris* of such a repast. Evelyn's guests were sound asleep, her son Tom had climbed to his nest in the attic loft overhead, and little Jim had gone to the land of Nod by the way of his mother's bed, before Evelyn had "picked up" and "set to rights" to her own satisfaction. But everything from the damask table-cloth to the flapjack griddle had been cared for at last. The last drop of the night's milk had been strained, the last of the morning's skimmed, and the last shining tin pan had been set in its place ready for the next day's milking, before Evelyn settled herself on her front doorstep for her evening cogitation. This doorstep was sacred to retrospect and to the sagest conclusions of Evelyn's mind. From it she gazed back into her past, and forward to that future glimmering from beyond Time's farthest horizon. The needles of the pines were pricking the gold of the twilight sky, and the "lightning-bugs" were darting in and out of the darkness of the foliage with their sparks of flickering fire, when Evelyn sat down and gazed off introspectively, seeing much, yet seeing nothing outwardly visible.

"Poor little mouse!" she exclaimed, "jest a mouse,

nothin' more ; for looks, I mean. For her natur', it's your'n, Cosset ; made for pettin' an' snugglin' up, jest like this, Cosset ;" and Evelyn drew close to her knee the head of a cosset lamb which ran up to her from the corner of the house the moment that she sat down.

"Jest like you, Cosset, she'll pine an' pine if she ain't jest comforted all the time. An' it ain't in *him*, no it ain't. He was jest made to be looked up to, and to be made much on. Of course he can't be givin' it he's takin' all the time. P'r'aps it's all right ! He's made to take and she to give, that's clear, but to give the best in her she'll have to be fed like you, Cosset, with a lovin' hand.

"I like Mister Cyril ; how can I help it, I'd like to know. A handsomer man, or grander like to look at, to my mind never drawed breath. But natur' never made him for a family man. She made him for the world ; she made him to shine, an' draw moths like a candle — not a taller one, nuther.

"But *she*, poor little creetur—all the shinin' was left out when she was made. She's winnin' looks and ways too, but she'll never be handsome an' takin' as he's handsome an' takin'. I'd like to know why I feel sorry when I look at her. I don't know, an' yet I do. I'm sure he's good to her, mighty good, an' considerate, so far, but there's a reason, sum reason, why it goes straight to my heart to look at her. I'll know what it is some time, if I can't now. Mebby it's because she's so young and innocent-lookin' ; mebby it's because she makes me think of Mimy, an' of my little Lucy if she'd lived. If my Lucy was to look so sort o' pitiful — goodness ! I'd snatch her up, hold her tight, and run

away with her from the bestest man in the world. I've a mother's feelin' for this un, the poor little married gal, that's certain. I hope she'll never need it more, but she will. I feel she will, all through my bones. It ain't 'cause I don't like Mr. Cyril; I do. Nor 'cause I think he don't love her, an' treat her the best, for he does. Yet the most I think on is, I'm sorry for her, an' can't help it. Well, 'tis mighty puzzlin'."

The next morning little Jim Dare mounted John, and rode through the woods and over the open country to Dufferin Street, for the telegram concerning little Cyril from Linda, to be sent daily to relieve his anxious mother's heart. "He was stronger than she had ever seen him, and constantly improving," the latest said. And a letter received a day or two later confirmed the joyful story. "The new milk agrees with him, and he is thriving on it beyond measure. I ride out with him every day, he sleeps with me, and is never out of my sight. All little Cyril wants of his mamma is to enjoy herself, and to improve in strength as fast as he does. I am cleaning house, that everything may look perfectly fresh when you come back, and that you may enjoy it without the trouble of making it so." Thus Linda wrote in her joint letter to Cyril and Agnes, her first directed to Dufferin Street. The envelope bore the name of "Cyril King, Esquire," and as that gentleman opened it before he handed it to his wife to read, there slid into his hand a tiny en-clo-sed note, which he with sleight-of-hand deftness slipped into his pocket unseen of any eyes save the dancing ones of Evelyn Dare, who with arms a-kimbo stood in the kitchen door, delighted at the arrival of a letter (always an event in a country

house), and eager to hear good news of the boy that she had never seen. Rapidly as the hand flew back, it was the Argus eyes behind him which saw the secret note slip into the coat-pocket. Evelyn, as she saw it, seemed to receive an involuntary shock, which caused her to rush instantly to the kitchen and to expend its momentum in a universal banging of the stove griddles. The most astonishing thing about the note was that it existed at all. Cyril read it in his boat on the Tarn a few minutes later; he having thought it safer to delay his departure from the house till after the advent of the expected letter. He had not asked Linda to write in any such way, but during the last evening's copying in the library she had hinted that she should send an inclosure if she felt that she had anything special to say to him. And he, not wishing it, yet feeling the spell of her powerful presence upon him, could not rouse resolution sufficient to say to her, "Nay." Thinking of it afterwards, he was conscious enough of her passion for doing that which was secret and contained risk, at least so far as he was concerned, to feel somewhat uneasy at the thought of the coming letter, lest he should be absent at its advent. The fact of a private enclosure from Linda to himself he knew that he could never explain to the satisfaction of Agnes, and he was honest in his wish that she should have no disturber to her present peace. Thus it was with a sense of relief that, after reading it, he tore the little note to atoms and watched its snowy flakes dissolve out of sight in the dark waters of the Tarn. The note contained only the old story — that the house and world were empty for her without the daily sight of him, that she lived in the

making all things bright for his coming and in counting the days till his return.

Agnes, in her rocking-chair by the back window of her little room, re-read Linda's letter many times. Even at so great a distance she felt a twinge of pain that it was in Linda's care that her boy was really taking hold of life. Ah, if she could have seen in him but a little more of the flush of health before she left him, his little face would not look so pathetically upon her out of her dreams! He was never so well as at this moment, though she, his mother, was far from him. But she would not be jealous — she would *try* not to be jealous of Linda, if she did have her child, and had taken possession of so much of her husband and her home. She had never dreamed of it before, but she had discovered lately that jealousy was one of the most positive and powerful of her own emotions. She must subdue it or die; or, living, make herself and others miserable. Yet how weak she felt to conquer it; she never could, if it once took possession of her. Only by quelling it on the very threshold of her heart could she flee from before it and save herself from its destruction. "It would kill me, kill me! to feel for hours what I have felt concentrated in moments," she said, her eyes still fixed on the slender and singularly sinuous chirography of the letter in her hand.

Grateful? Yes, she was more grateful than she could say, that her child was stronger; she would think of this alone. And fastening tight her door and drawing close her curtain, she kneeled before the little chair; and as she bowed her youthful head Linda's open letter was crushed close beneath her face. She simply took

her trouble to the Almighty Father, to whom she had been taught to pray before she could speak his name. It was the prayer of a woman yet a girl, who instinctively recoiled from evil though she knew not what the evil was ; who was but slowly gaining knowledge of herself and of others, but who was keenly conscious of pain and of inability to bear it. Thus she bowed her head and in silent, unutterable desire prayed for help and strength to make the best and most of her life, for others and herself, whatever that life might be.

With such a prayer comes peace ever, at least for a season. When Agnes arose the look of trouble had faded out of her face, and as she drew her curtain and gazed out toward the Tarn and saw Cyril sitting motionless in his boat, with his fishing-rod drooping peacefully over the water, the light of love and happiness came into her eyes.

There was certainly nothing in Linda's letter to cause any prevailing feeling in Agnes save that of gratitude and thankfulness. She knew this ; therefore followed this struggle with herself in which grace triumphed. Yet her disturbed feeling was not in excess of the actual fact which caused it, which she did not know, but which, not knowing, she no less unconsciously felt. If she had seen Cyril read Linda's secret note she could scarcely have been more disturbed than she was at the moment of his reading it, though she knew it not. And could she have seen Linda at that moment sailing about her house with the air of full possession and triumph, she could hardly have been more moved than she was, not knowing it, yet reading her letter still vibrant with the actual atmosphere out of which it came.

To women of limited resources and intense personal activity, periodical house-cleaning seems to be at once a relief and a remedy from anxious thoughts and actual ill. Agnes' house certainly was not suffering for a stereotyped cleaning. It was too thoroughly made ready for her sickness to have fallen into great disorder after. Nevertheless it was necessary to Linda's complete satisfaction, that it should now be cleaned and that she should be the "cleaner." Not the duster and scrubber and brusher, — oh, no! — but the supervisor and empress of all. Never before in her life had she had such a house at her disposal. It was necessary for her to clean it according to her own ideal before she could feel that she had come actually into possession of it. For the present this was her most powerful desire. She was never so happy as when she was acting, if she could only invest the acting in her own mind with a sense of reality.

The cars which bore Cyril and Agnes away were not more than out of sight before she drew little Cyril to her heart and said, "Now *all* is mine : this house, all that is in it, and *you*, baby. Papa has gone away for a little while, and mamma and baby are left alone to count the hours till he comes back, and to make all bright for his return." In her letter to Cyril and Agnes, Linda did not think it necessary to state to them all the processes involved in her house-cleaning. She wanted to know everything that house contained in order to become more thoroughly acquainted with it, and to make it seem more really her *own*, and to prepare her more completely for future action. After his life-long acquaintance with her, even Cyril would have

been astonished could he have seen Linda sitting at his desk hour after hour, examining personally every paper that it contained. Like all peepers, she made discoveries far from pleasant. After infinite pains, which involved the calling of a locksmith to fit a key to an inside private drawer, she found that it held nothing but a miniature of Agnes which Cyril had worn in a locket through his college years, and a collection of all the letters which Agnes had ever written him. These were tied in packages, and carefully labelled and inscribed with such sentences as these : " Letters written to me during 18— by my darling Agnes," or " Letters of sweet-heart for 18—." Every letter in every package she read, and but the more eagerly as the lines in her face tightened, and her skin grew ashen gray. These letters astonished her more than anything from the pen of Cyril could possibly have done, not for the love breathing through them, for she knew how Agnes loved him, but for their sensitiveness to beauty, depth of feeling, and spontaneous grace of expression. She was keenly susceptible to such grace, and knew that Cyril would be also. She began to perceive the mental and spiritual charm in Agnes which had touched and held Cyril, with which the face that Linda despised had nothing to do, save in some rare moment to reflect it. She was wise enough and subtle enough to perceive this, but the perception only hardened her heart the more against Agnes, because by so much she saw how deep a hold such a nature might have on Cyril. The house was hers for the present, hers to ransack from bottom to top ; but some of the discoveries which she made in her pursuit after knowledge certainly did not fortify her

sense of possession. By the time she had rummaged to the most secret recess of Agnes' pretty desk (a birthday present from Cyril which stood in her own room), Linda leaned her head upon her hand in abject wretchedness, seeing without glamour the absolute fact which she had tried so hard to defy, set against the pitiful farce of possession which she had created and then by her own acts destroyed.

If Agnes' love-letters to Cyril were hard to read, what depth of misery was evoked by those of Cyril to Agnes. With a pain that she would not spare herself, Linda drew them forth from their bed of faded flowers and delicate perfumes, untied the ribbons which bound them, and read them every one. During the years that he wrote them he wrote to her, almost as often, letters which she thought were love-letters then, — then, when he denied that Agnes Darcy was more to him than his friend! What were his letters to her, compared to these that he wrote to "his friend!" These almost took her breath away while she read, glowing and throbbing as they were with a first romantic love, and that the love of a nature as passionate as it was self-centred and strong.

"To her! All this to her! when I was living on his words and believing him when he said that she was nothing but his friend! You *shall* pay for this, if I die to make you!"

Meanwhile there was revolt in the kitchen. Linda locked the doors when the letter-searching process was going on, but in keeping little Cyril in sight it was impossible to hide everything from Betty, the nurse.

"I don't like it, an' I shan't like it, an' I'll tell missis

the hull," she exclaimed to Chloe, the cook. "House-cleanin' when 'tis house-cleanin' is well enough; but who ever heard of cleanin' house in August, when the flies are all a-speekin', an' it'll all have to be cleaned over in October? P'r'aps Mister King *did* ask her to 'range all his papers, but you can't make *me* believe missis asked her to go to the bottom of all her trunks an' bureaus, as she says she did. Peekin' into everything ain't cleanin' house, nor wearin' her lovely wrappers to rock the baby in ain't, nuther! Jest as if wrapper, baby, an' all was hers! I'll jest tell missis, I will."

"Oh, you just keep still," said Chloe. "Only trouble comes of tattlin'. She may rummage if she wants to, if she'll only stop orderin' *me*. It's my opinion she never had no one to order afore. You can always tell such, they take on such high and mighty airs. I'd give warnin' if missis warn't comin' home so soon, but I've lived with her from the fust, and I can't leave her now when she needs me more 'n ever."

"Nor I," said Colin the gardener. "She just knows every root and bush on the place as well as I do. Many's the one she's helped me set out. It's not twice in one man's life he can live with a lady as loves his flowers and roots as well as he hisself. I couldn't leave her, but I wouldn't stop a week with t'other one. She don't know asparagus from a turnip top, yet she comes out and orders *me*! Don't I laugh in my sleeve and do as I have a mind to? and I shall, till missis comes back. No other woman needn't think she's going to boss me" (with a side glance at Betty, young and pretty). "My father was born in Scotland, an' I've his belief about women folks orderin'. **The**

Lord forbids it." (All this for Betty, who could *make* him walk at the beck of her little finger.) "But I'll always do jest as missis wants me to, for she never orders, and in knowledge is my equal, an' in my line; that is what many women ain't. As for t'other one I've no belief in her at all, an' I tell you for your good, Miss Betty, you'd better keep out of the reach of her claws. She's got 'em, if she does wear velvet gloves. Mind my words, that woman's a cat. I've a sort of an inklin' she could be a wild cat. 'Tain't for no love of her, but don't let any on us do nothing to make it hard for poor missis when she gets back."

This is a faint reflection of life at Lotusmere. While it was lived, no evil passion, no petty care, touched the peace of the days and nights at Tarnstone Pinnacle.

Antæus touching his mother-earth was not more invincible than seemed the happiness of Agnes and Cyril while they lived hour by hour in direct contact with nature. Far away was the vast world of ambition and effort, of struggle and friction, to which one belonged. Far away the weary days of acquiescence and endurance, of negative happiness and positive pain, which had come to make so entirely the life of the other. Now the peace of nature, deep and good, rested on her like a benediction. It repaired her losses, it healed her wounds, it enkindled and inspired her faculties. It restored to her without shadow of doubt the fulness and completeness of love's fruition, which it seemed to her but a few days before she had forever lost.

Is there a more significant fact in human experience than that two who can be divided by an alien force till

their entire intercourse is filled with doubt, distrust, jealousy, and estrangement, if left alone to themselves, free from a dividing medium, come spontaneously together, one soul answering to the other soul in natural response, without doubt or fear to mar the peace of their perfect communion ?

More than the joy of "love's young dream" which they had known in their first days at Lotusmere came to Cyril and Agnes here in this sanctuary of nature, for each had reached this peace by a pass of pain known to his and to her nature alone.

Cyril did not know how much he had been annoyed and harassed till here he took the hand of his wife, with naught to worry, to molest, or to make him afraid.

Agnes did not know how much she had lost till it all seemed to come back again, and she laid her hand in her husband's and looked up into his beloved face without a doubt or a fear.

Yet this was the same Cyril, the same Agnes, who had uttered sharp and complaining words to each other, who in moments had felt so disturbed by each other and so far apart. Under the stress of discordant conditions this might be possible again, but it was impossible now. No one was there to rob or to mar them. They had only their best selves to give to each other.

Even little Cyril, too far away to trouble him, became again ideal to his father; while the daily story of his growing health gave his mother a happiness in her love for him and a thrill of delight in the thought of returning to him, it was not in her power to feel when she looked hourly on his suffering.

When Agnes sat by Cyril in the boat out on the

Tarn ; or waited for him by some wayside brook, while he fished along the stream ; or wandered in the pasture, gathering fragrant ferns wherewith to garnish Evelyn's little house ; or sat by the forest spring, watching the grasshoppers vaulting through the air or holding convocations on mossy logs ; or listened to the crickets in the grass ; or fed the happy family composed of the chickens, ducks, cats, and the cosset lamb ; or followed Evelyn in and out of her dairy, lending a helping hand ; or sewed or sketched in the open door while Evelyn, busy at her work, sang at the top of her voice, —

“ A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky,”

or some other inspiring Methodist hymn : in each and all she drew new life and joy in through every pore, and was blissfully content.

Denizens of the world, they had gone back to nature and to nature's God. Theirs for a season were paradisiacal days ; but they were days of earth, and must end. They had known a month in Eden, but it was gone, and they must go out together back to the world.

“ I dread it,” said Agnes ; “ don't you, Cyril ? Oh, if we could only have little Cyril brought to us, and then stay here always ! ”

“ But I could not fish always, and in winter the snow falls as high as this house. Then I shouldn't know what to do with myself, and you wouldn't know what to do with me, Aggie.”

“ Yes, I should. We would work and study together and teach baby, who would be a little boy. You should

write books and I would copy them, and when the snow melted you should go out and deliver great orations which would astonish everybody. For I wouldn't bury your talents ; but you would never stay away a week, and always be so glad to come back to baby and to me, and we should all be so happy ! We could live such peaceful lives ! We wouldn't want much, it wouldn't be hard and wearing and wearying to live here, as it is to live in the world, where life is such a struggle and pain. I dread to go back to it, Cyril. It is so much easier to be good and happy when we live so near to nature. I think I feel as Eve did when she went with Adam out of Paradise — minus the pang of having eaten a forbidden apple."

"No, forbidden apples are perfectly safe so far as you are concerned," said Cyril, gazing on her face musingly. "You will never even hanker after them. For myself, ever since I can remember I have wanted what it was not easy to get, or what I ought not to have. On that account the Pinnacle would be an excellent spot for me to remain in. No forbidden fruit will ever grow here. The Pinnacle was made for vacations, but not for a life-time, not for mine."

"What a refuge it would be if one were in trouble !" said Agnes, gazing out for the last time toward the spire-like woods veining the twilight sky, to the sleeping cattle and the tranquil fields. "Oh, Cyril, if anything dreadful should ever happen to me, if I were alone and wretched, I know my first impulse would be to come back to this blessed spot where we have been so happy — and to Evelyn."

"God forbid that *you* should ever be alone and

wretched. You never shall be while I live, precious, that is certain," and Cyril, as if moved to a powerful impulse by the thought that he had uttered, drew Agnes to his heart as if to protect her forever, and kissed her with all the fervor of a lover.

Then he held her slightly off and gazed on her face — at the softly rounded cheeks touched with pink bloom, at the clear, brown, happy eyes, and as if he had just discovered it, exclaimed, "What a change! Is this the Agnes that I brought here four weeks ago? Never did a prescription before work such a miracle! See what happiness can do! Was it Evelyn's cream, or my company, Aggie?"

"Both," answered the happy wife.

CHAPTER X.

THE RISING MAN.

“**POOR** Cyril ! how thin he looks,” said Linda.

“**I** have not observed it,” replied Agnes coldly.

“Oh, no. Why should you ? You have quite enough to do to attend to your own ailments.”

“Who should more if he *is* worn and thin ?” said Agnes in a sharpened tone. Then she sighed, and her voice saddened as she said, “I have not seen him long enough at a time for the last two months, to study any change in him ; in his features, I mean. Certainly he laughs and talks gayly enough to indicate that his spirits are good ;” and she felt, without being able to help it, that she gave a bitter inflection to her words.

This was the happy Agnes with whom we parted nearly five years before at Tarnstone Pinnacle. Let us look at her and see what these years have given her and taken from her. They have given her another child, a little Hebe of a girl, this moment crooning and carolling on her lap, Vida, the beloved, who came to quell somewhat of the anguish death had made in her mother’s heart when it took her second child, a little boy, whose tiny grave is marked by a lamb in marble lying in a bed of flowers, in a sequestered nook of the lawn of Lotusmere, near his mother’s old seat by the Sound. Little Cyril, now a boy in his sixth year, more

than fulfils the promise of his babyhood. He has his mother's eyes and hair, and his father's beauty of outline etherealized. There is something indefinably ideal in his aspect and expression, such as one often sees in the dream-children of pictures, but rarely in those who live long upon the earth. Nevertheless the last trace of sickness has faded from the delicately rounded limbs and cheeks of the child. He looks in the very bloom of rosy, if not of robust health. Yet no intuitive student of child-nature can be with him an hour without discovering the excitable, nervous susceptibility, the preponderance of mental and spiritual force over the vital, which ever marks the child who falls the inevitable prey to unsuspected, insidious disease. He is at once his mother's idol and the object of her never-ceasing solicitude. She cannot explain to herself why, while he looks and seems so well, she should constantly feel that she holds him by so frail and uncertain a tenure. She concludes it must be because he was so sickly a baby that she cannot outlive the impression which she then received of his early death. At any rate, even now, when she begins to picture his future she finds herself stopping with a sudden and sighing "if." "If you live, my angel"—and she snatches him to her heart and holds him tight within her arms, as if to save him from some unseen, yet impending ill. How different with Vida, the little daughter of earth! It never occurs to her mother, or to any one else, that she can die, because from the very beginning of her existence she has seemed so perfectly able to live. She is the child of triumph. She was born while her mother, wrung with grief, and stung with the wounds of certain

injury, turned at last to assert the rights of her own happiness in her own home, and she was born in the fulness of her father's assured success as a rising man. These powerful conditions in her pre-natal life prevailed over the shadow of loss which preceded her advent. She is full of fire and temper, yet withal penetrated with sunshine, for she inherits the blonde brightness of her father, and his intense vitality of temperament. Her mother seems a soft, sad background to this little golden sprite dancing on her lap. I have no words to tell what these five years of life have wrought in Agnes. It is easy to measure outward loss and gain, but the lines which life traces upon the soul, who may decipher! Agnes is not the Agnes she would have been had not these five years, the years which were to decide her fate, been lived with Linda. Since we saw her last she has passed from girlhood to womanhood. She has gained in intensity of feeling, in power of thought, in strength of character, but — and how sorry I am to say it of her — born for love and loving, she is less outwardly attractive, and less inwardly lovable now than she was then. The clear insight, the passion for truth, the desire for justice, the stern moral sense, all, grown more penetrating and exacting through their daily wounds, combine to make the dominant force of her nature. Were they at peace, they would reign in equipoise with brain and heart. Stung to assertion, often to revolt, they tyrannize even over her sad, yearning affections. These, deepened by their very repression, flow still and inward, and seldom make spontaneous sign, save to her children. Were her mind less clear, her moral faculties less ex-

acting, she would gather up the marred fragments of such love as she can get, and, after the manner of thousands of her sisters, be thankful, if not happy. Constituted as she is, she falls prone upon the defaced, fallen, yet glorious image of her ideal love, and weeps in silence, because she knows that all the world holds for its loss no consolation and no compensation. The mother of three children in less than five years, this demand alone upon her life was enough to impair the freshness of youth and the exuberance of untried health. But when to physical suffering, heart grief, overtaxed strength, and spiritual torture are added, we need not marvel that at twenty-four, Agnes looks at least ten years older than her age, or that the hovering beauty which once touched her with its halo seems to have utterly faded, leaving her face gray almost in its pallor, with not a ray of inward light shining through the once luminous eyes. They have one steady, sad outlook, and to a man like Cyril King, nothing can be more tiresome to look at, than eyes habitually sad. It is not easy to make apparent in words the fact that there was in Agnes' life any adequate cause for this abiding condition of mind and heart. Certainly Cyril thought that there was not. At the end of five years he was as oblivious of the fact that there was a real cause of unhappiness in Linda's presence, as he was on the first day of her arrival. Indeed, he was more so; for Linda had made herself an absolute necessity to the household; more, she had made herself absolutely its mistress,—not in name, or to the world, but in reality. Through Agnes' long and serious illnesses she had been sole manager of the house, and when

Agnes recovered sufficiently to appear once more in her family, it was with too feeble a hold on life to make her adequate to more than the supervision of her children. Thus the household-reins still remained in Linda's hands. All the conflicting conditions and emotions which Linda brought with her at the beginning remained unabated; indeed, they had deepened in intensity, and, as time went on, became more exasperating and harder to bear. But as year was added to year the causes which inspired gratitude toward Linda increased also. To have forgotten and ignored the good she had done in this family was as impossible as to have traced and defined the evil and sorrow she had wrought. Agnes could not forget, even under the keenest provocation, that it was Linda who by night and by day nursed her dying child when her own strength had failed, and she was powerless to tend him; nor that when her own life was ebbing out, and even Doctor Bache feared she would die, it was Linda who bent over her and seemed to bring her back to her husband and children. How often she forced herself to remember these things when some goading word or act of Linda's made the life which she had so powerfully helped to save seem almost valueless through pain, to its possessor! Yet how easily she could have borne anything from Linda that had not seemed to take from her her husband. That she did take him, that she took him deliberately, in a thousand subtle yet perfectly conscious ways from his own wife, Agnes at last was perfectly certain; and when she was certain, her whole nature recoiled, and her whole soul rose up in revolt against the destroyer of her peace.

Yet even here was she at disadvantage, and the sport of fate. Physiologically, she married too young. Bodily as well as spiritually she was unequal to the demands of marriage. Through the constant bearing and rearing of children, through prolonged grief at the death of one of them, Agnes, for the greater portion of those years, had been an invalid, compelled to accept the ministry of others when she yearned only to be the minister. While she was shut away in a darkened room, or unable to descend the stairs unless carried down them, seeing Cyril only when he came to her ; Linda, alert, omnipresent, and never-tiring, ever within call or by his side, anticipating every want and wish even before he was conscious of them himself, serving him by night and by day, — she it was who by such perpetual service made herself indispensable to his home comfort and daily existence. Not that he had ceased to love Agnes. He said to himself, “I shall never forget what is due to the mother of my children.” He loved her as an object of never-ceasing care and solicitude ; he loved her, — yes, though he knew it not, — he loved her still as the first love of his heart, and the wife of his youth. But her presence had ceased to be indispensable to his happiness. She was something to be protected and taken care of ; she was no longer the spontaneous spring of his own delight.

How much longer than it has taken to write of it was this slow, sure process of spiritual alienation between husband and wife going on, and working out its bitter, inevitable end ! In what nameless nothings it first revealed itself ! Yet the irrevocable cause which plied it hour by hour, and never ceased, was as surely

and secretly at work as the worm in the bud. Had they lived under conditions soothing to each nature, they would never have grown apart. But doomed to discords which neither knew how to master, and with an ever-descending wedge between them driven down by an unerring hand, they were sure to go asunder. Is there anything sadder in human experience than that two may love each other tenderly, yet with utter inadequacy to measure each other's nature, to comprehend each other's special needs, or to rest serenely within each other's limitations?

With what self-forgetfulness Agnes rejoiced in Cyril's successes when she knew them! But when the fulness of his triumph came, she could realize nothing of its value to him as a man; she could not see the light of certain promise which it cast upon his future, for she was shut in the chamber of pain, and the pangs of physical nature made the knowledge of external things impossible. In the fulness of health she was an unworldly woman. How often Cyril told her this was one of her faults, that she cared so little either for riches or honors. She was perfectly true to her nature when she sighed because she must go back to the world, and could have found perfect peace and happiness in the love of her husband and child for a whole life-time, spent in Evelyn's log-hut at Tarnstone Pinnacle. She wanted Cyril to have money and fame and success, because he wanted them. If he could never have won either, he would have been no less Cyril, no less to be desired, no less a god in the eyes of his wife. Her indifference to the world of affairs in which he was so eager an actor, which Cyril first felt to his annoyance

after the birth of little Cyril, increased with the birth of other children, with her absorption in them, and her own constantly ailing health. The pomp and glory of the world were poor indeed, to her, when she watched her child pass out of her sight into the valley of shadows, and she herself stood upon its brink. And when the first crowning success in Cyril's career came, she was in spirit and in person farther away from the world which had crowned him than she had ever been before. Few know, until they have passed them, the crises in their lives. How much happier it had been for both, could Cyril have comprehended and rested in the comprehension that Agnes, in paying the fearful penalty of her womanhood, was taxed to the utmost limit of her power ; that it was through no lack of sympathy, but through human inability, that she failed to realize all that eager, active public life could be to him, a man in the early fulness of health, strength, and ambition. Could he have realized all this, and waited, naturally as a flower turns to the light she would have gravitated back to him, and in some serene hour afterwards, freed from the bonds of pain and the weariness of physical weakness, in the perfect command of her fine faculties, and in sweet possession of her tender spirit, she would have come forth from the shadow of disability into the full light, to stand by his side, his helper and his wife. Was it not for his sake — because she was his wife — that she could not do this at the present moment ?

The husband supremely true would have bided his time. He would have said, "My friends need not pity me, and tell me that I am alone. Never was I less alone. My love, my wife, in the hush and dim

ness of her room is serving me, living for me, suffering for me. Can I be ingrate enough to forget it? Can I bask in the smiles of idle women to the neglect and forgetfulness of her? Never! I will be man enough, and true enough, to wait. I will bear with weariness, weakness, fretfulness even, now. By and by she will come forth to share the honors that I have won. Amid her children, redeemed from the pangs of motherhood, she will wear its crown, and I, her husband, will crown her lovely head!"

It was not in the nature of Cyril, nor in his habits, nor in the will of Linda, that he should have such thoughts, much less utter them, even to himself. What he thought was that no one was so little conscious of his present successes as his wife; that while Linda was perpetually repeating compliments from Mrs. So-and-so, and almost every woman whom he met smiled upon him, as a handsome, rising man, Agnes was less impressed than anybody else with the greatness of her husband. He came from houses filled with light, music, and beautiful women, all voluble with cheap homage and indiscriminate praise, to find his wife sick, and his children perhaps crying, and Linda ready to receive him and serve him as a martyr. After becoming thoroughly imbued with her whisperings, he could always fall back on the comforting conclusion waiting in reserve: "Well, if I can't get what I want at home, I will take what I can get elsewhere."

This assertion, impinging on the domain of license, had no such root in his mind. The most dangerous thing in it was that it had no moral significance at all in his consciousness. It was simply the utterance of

impulsive discontent. What he could get elsewhere he knew were admiration, flattery, homage, the perpetual felicity of being "made much of;" and these were what he wanted. He had never taken the trouble to trace them to their ultimate sequence. Had he done so, even he would have recoiled from the result.

There is one type of the American who gravitates as naturally to politics as a young duck to water. Such an one was Cyril King. He was a politician by virtue of his blood, as well as of his brains and breeding. In public speech he was just what his father, Tim King, would have been with his son's training and opportunities. He possessed the power of ready, fluent, eloquent utterance, the more ready, fluent, and eloquent because it was not profound. He seized by instinct the salient point of every question, holding it up with striking distinctness, and had a faculty for sailing over the surface of common things with a grace which invested them at once with poetry and importance in the minds of average listeners. When to these gifts of oratory we add those of a musical voice, an electric temperament, a commanding person, and a strikingly handsome face, we have all the elements of the popular speaker — the man who moves men to stormy excitements; women to quivering smiles and tears, born of his looks, words, and tones; and maidens to romantic admiration and ideal fancies, which expend themselves in song, slippers, smoking caps, and insane billet-doux offered up to the rhetorical invader of their dreams.

All these pent up forces Cyril King felt stirring in his blood, when, bending over the drudgery of law in his library, he declared to his absent, gouty partners

that he could fly, and therefore would not climb, and that the morning was not far off when they would wake to find him perched far above them. So far as recognized talent was concerned, this assertion became speedily true. The Lotusport "Argus" discerned its rising man in his first important oration.

This discovery was followed by constant invitations to participate in town, then in county gatherings. Soon Cyril King became as indispensable to the great political convocations of his congressional district as Tim King was to the ward meetings in the rural city of Ulm. He gave every spare moment and then the whole force of his nature to a closely contested campaign. His party elected its candidate, and when that candidate's term expired, so valued were the political services, and so great the personal popularity of Cyril King, he was elected, almost by acclamation, a representative in the Congress of the United States.

CHAPTER XL

PORTENTS.

WITHOUT knowing it, Cyril and Agnes King had come to be one of those wedded pairs the mention of whose names society delights to preface with a sigh. This sigh is sent forth not to evoke sympathy, but to quicken curiosity. "Yes, Mrs. King, poor thing!" or, "Cyril King, poor fellow!" in a tone implying confidential intimacy with the subject of pity,—that subject being either one of the pair according to the supposed sympathy of the listener. Of course the Lotusport mind was divided in its conclusions concerning "just the state" of the King family. The question ever open to discussion was this: "Is Mrs. King the wife for Mr. King?" All the young ladies of Lotusport, and most of the married ones, decided that she was not.

The question reversed was never asked,—not in Lotusport. It had been asked and answered to her own dissatisfaction by Evelyn Dare, studying human nature on the front step of her log-house, with nothing more tangibly suggestive of it before her eyes than the dim woods and the twilight sky. But Evelyn was "not in society." Had she been, she would have been so delightfully conscious of the preponderating value of Cyril King over his wife, as a brilliant ornament of

it, to have ever thought of reversing the question. Cyril King was in society; his wife was not. It was but natural that society should judge tenderly its own. No word of disparagement, much less of complaint, had ever passed the lips of either concerning the other. Either would have recoiled with shocked pride and keen pain from the knowledge that their fitness or unfitness for each other, their probable unhappiness and improbable joy, were topics of current discussion.

Most of us rejoice in an ostrich-like faith that with our hearts out of sight, we ourselves are equally invisible. Cyril and Agnes were the very last to discover that they were one of those couples over whom, in private, society takes a sly delight in lifting its eyebrows, shrugging its shoulders, and uttering little "dear me's," with the added: "*They* were never meant for each other, never! He is *such* a brilliant man, so talented, so handsome, so agreeable, so fascinating: and she! a perfect little mope; sick all the time — or thinks she is; full of complaints; cares nothing for society; doesn't even return the calls of her neighbors; has no accomplishments, no style — not an atom; plain, very plain — positively ugly in some lights; and he a perfect Apollo. What *does* possess such men to marry such women! They nearly always do, then spend all their lives after, finding consolation in other women's society."

"Before Mr. King entered public life it was no concern of the public what sort of a wife he had," murmured "society" through the soft voice and child-like mouth of Circe Sutherland. "But of course the moment a man enters the arena of politics, if his wife is his inferior the contrast is dreadfully apparent; and it

is often commented on more to his disadvantage than to hers. The district has such reason to be proud of Mr. King. I doubt if there will be another man in Congress to compare with him in beauty and eloquence combined, and you naturally wish to take some pride in his wife. Even Lotusport does not want to think that it has sent a woman to represent it at the capital, of whom it is ashamed; a woman without breeding, or beauty, or style, or anything that will make her shine, or even be presentable in society. Pray, how did your wonderful Cyril King ever marry such a person?" and as she asked this question, Circe Sutherland shut her eyes and leaned back in the great wicker chair on the verandah, slowly fanning herself, while a smile like a ripple ran through her mobile features. Her whole aspect indicated that she was supremely indifferent or supremely content over the fact that Cyril King was said to have an unpresentable wife.

"Why, it is the old story," answered her friend, at whose villa she was spending the day. "I have it from his cousin, who of course knows all about it. She is Mr. King's foster-sister; they grew up together, and now she has the entire supervision of the house — for Mrs. King isn't even a housekeeper. You know just what she is, when I tell you she is always ailing, never goes with him anywhere — and you have seen for yourself how intensely he enjoys society. Why, Miss Kane has even to return most of her calls. It was when she called here that she told me, in a very few words of course, — indeed, it was rather implied than otherwise, — that it was — their marriage, I mean — one of those girl and boy affairs which such a man is

sure to outgrow. They went to school together when they were children, became engaged as children will; but when the time really came for marriage, I inferred from what Miss Kane said that it was a decision of honor on his part. He was too honorable to break his word. Yet he was a mere boy. Could he have waited, his choice would have been a very different one, of course." (A sigh.) "As you say, Circe, had he staid in private life, which for such a man would have been impossible, nobody outside of their little circle would have troubled himself about his wife. But now 'tis different. What will life at the Capital be to such a woman! She will only go there to be a drag on him, and to make us all ashamed of her as our representative in society. Dear me! Why do so many people go awry in this world? Now *you*, Circe, are just the woman to go to Washington as the wife of a public man; just the sight of you with him would double his power and influence wherever he went. And what opportunity and influence it would open to you! Why in the name of fitness don't fate send such a man as Cyril King across your path, or you across his, in season?"

"Because such men are usually appropriated in advance, and by just such women as you have described his wife to be," answered Circe, while a pink tint slowly stained through the magnolia whiteness of her face, and she sank into a reverie, apparently far removed from all surrounding objects, her fan dropping into her lap, and her velvety black eyes dilating into ineffable softness as they gazed far out where the dark blue line of the Sound merged into the more celestial blue of the horizon.

This conversation took place shortly after Cyril King's election to Congress, and when Agnes King did not know that such a being as Circe Sutherland existed on the earth.

No one was astonished but himself at Cyril King's success in society. It was a triumph that he did not anticipate in a sphere in which he felt the least familiar. But who, seeing Cyril King in a drawing-room, amid beautiful women and remarkable men, would not have said that he was born to be therein a central object of attraction? His sudden personal popularity in society was as fascinating to him as it was bewildering and unexpected. The finest social recognition brings the keenest sense of triumph to those who, not inheriting it, yet grow by virtue of themselves to command it. Cyril was not astonished at his own success either in his profession or in politics. He knew in advance that he held in himself the elements of application and power which in time must make his success in these directions certain. He had not thought of it, but if he had he would have felt no such certainty concerning his personal social success. How could he, remembering Ulm? There he lived a beautiful boy, and a youth of the rarest promise; he was petted, flattered, helped, promoted, and yet ever reminded by some woman's word or way that he was a son of Tim King the drunkard.

He had already risen to the vantage ground from whence he looked down and smiled in triumph even upon that fact. In the campaign preceding his election his opponents had tried to use it to his disadvantage. Their effort fell as flat as their candidate. He

might have been the very devil's son, but having the gifts and graces that he did, the charm of voice, splendor of person, magnetism of manner, and aura of success, he could not be less to his worshippers, nor was it scarcely possible that he could be more.

He entered society to meet one of the demands of his campaign. How little he dreamed of the charm and the snare that it would prove to him ! His mercurial temperament responded at once to its most subtle and seductive influences. He felt intuitively the most delicate attrition of other minds. He kindled and glowed responsive to mirth, wit, the inter-flash and play of repartee and dazzling discourse. His beauty-loving senses fed and flourished on music, light, color, odor, and harmony. What nature was to Agnes, society became to Cyril — an all-pervading minister, filling and satisfying, for the time, sense and soul. To find himself a central force amid such elements, drawing by his own potentiality of the rarest and most exquisite within his own atmosphere, was at once a revelation and a temptation more overpowering than he had ever been called upon before to meet, and to resist.

It was the beginning of the end of the baleful result which in varied phase awaits the husband or wife who goes forth to live any life, be it of action, intellect, or pleasure, alone. Could Agnes have gone with him into what is called the "gay world," all its impressions on him would have been modified and equalized. We know that the time had been when Cyril spent evening after evening in his own home with his wife, not only content but unquestionably happy. That was when no fact or condition separated them, when it was in the

power of Agnes to minister to him as society ministered to him now. That time was long passed. Agnes' brown eyes looked out clear and tender as of old, but somehow unconsciously he often shrank from their gaze. There was a look of inquiry, at times he thought of judgment, in them, which made him uncomfortable. This feeling in him was no proof of a lack of love. The more a man loves his wife the more sensitive he is to her opinion of him, and the less able he is to bear her judgment upon his defects, if he has the faintest intimation that that judgment may be unfavorable.

Everybody flattered Cyril but Agnes. He knew how much she was sick ; he knew also how often she was alone. He felt perfectly certain that she lived through many hours in which she felt lonely and neglected. He could not altogether silence the voice which told him that she had keen cause for such feelings. He tried to quell it with the old-time assurance that she was unreasonable, or she would let Linda be her companion when she was lonely and he so intensely occupied. Occupied ! His conscience would give a little twinge here. All his occupation could not make him forget the fact that, somehow, when it stared him in the face, appalled even himself, — Agnes was no longer wholly or even chiefly necessary to him. How many objects had come into his life, in which his thoughts and emotion centred, of which she had no knowledge !

This fact more than any other drew him from the old companionship once so sufficing and so dear. It gave him a new consciousness of restraint in her presence. Beside, a suspicion springing from a clear intuition often floated through his mind, that while he had

risen in the world's favor, he had fallen in his wife's estimation. She loved him no less, — he scarcely doubted that, — but she loved him no longer blindly; she saw him as he was; her large, unclouded spiritual vision saw his faults as clearly as his graces and his gifts. She loved him no less for his faults, but she saw them. The latter fact remained paramount in his mind, and made him uncomfortable.

But had Agnes no friends, hers through the charm of her own nature? Did her passion for truth and beauty, her gentle and tender womanliness, go for nought? In the world's garish light, yes. To those who knew her, and therefore loved her, no. The husband and wife had a few friends in common, who perceived the inner light always burning in her soul, by the fine but certain gleams it sent forth unaware, by the spiritual nimbus that often enshrined her in its halo, as if she were a saint.

“Poor Mrs. King!” these friends would say. “If she only had health and didn't seem so broken, she would be quite the equal of Mr. King, in her way, let people say what they will.”

“Poor Mrs. King!” That oft-repeated phrase told the whole story. People could give no good reason for pitying her, aside from her ill-health, but they did, every time that they looked into her face; till “poor Mrs. King” came to be the current stereotyped phrase, among her friends, whenever her name was mentioned. There could be no surer sign of the slowly growing spiritual alienation between the husband and wife, than the fact that without either uttering a complaint, their friends were always unconsciously arraigned either on the side of one or the other.

Agnes' steadfast friend, and Doctor Bache, would strike his stout cane deep into the Lotusport soil, and turn with a fierce ejaculation, when he heard some glowing constituent bemoan the fact that "the new member — such a brilliant man, such a popular man, so sure to reflect glory upon his constituents in the councils of the nation — should have such a drag upon him as a sick wife."

"Drag!" the doctor would exclaim in wrath. "I don't like to hear any woman, least of all *such* a woman, called a drag on her husband because she has given her life to be the mother of his children. The least that he can do is to give in return a little, just a little, of his own, in love and care, for what she has suffered for him. If he does, is she the drag? Is there no drag in *her* life, I'd like to know? Shut away from everything but sickness and children, at least three fourths of the time! Does it ever shut him away from anything that he wants? If it does, you may talk about her being a drag. I've nothing against the new member. King is as bright and handsome as he can be; but I'm sick of hearing him praised to his wife's disparagement. He's not her equal, let me tell you, with all his show. Her equal isn't in Lotusport, and never will be, in my opinion."

With this profession of his faith Doctor Bache would lift his cane with such a sudden energy that his listener would start in fear lest he might break his head open with it. But he only lifted it to emphasize it deeper into the earth as he strode away, leaving his auditor wondering "what the old doctor could see in Mrs. King to make such a fuss about, that nobody else could see."

More than one saw the spiritual light which Doctor Bache so clearly discerned, but they did not own the average eyes of Lotusport. A single voice had penetrated its common air, penetrated it in whispers; it was a voice that loved to whisper. The more that sickness and sorrow withdrew Agnes from the village life, the more Linda dwelt in it.

"I only represent Mrs. King," she would say in receiving and returning calls. "I know that it is *her* that you wish to see, but you will have to take me as a substitute." And by some way — an imperceptible way — she always left her listeners impressed with the fact of her own capability and self-sacrifice, and equally with the weakness, inefficiency, and altogether good-for-nothingness of "dear Agnes." When she had anything very detrimental to imply of her it was always "dear Agnes." Nothing could exceed the tender, pitying tones in which she insinuated disagreeable traits and shortcomings in "dear Agnes." Thus the average impression in Lotusport came to be, that "Miss Kane was a martyr to the King family," and that Mrs. King was a weak, selfish, uncomfortable invalid, and no more. There were a few who knew better, among these the poor who lived on Water Street. Molly Davis, Skipper Ben's wife, loved her as one dearer than an angel, yet more than a woman. But only because out of her own love and sorrow Agnes had come to Molly when little Ben died. Each talked of her lost child till the two women threw their arms about each other and wept together. They knew no distinction; they were one in a single sorrow — the skipper's wife and the member's wife — beside two little graves.

CHAPTER XII.

“GOOD-BY, SWEETHEART.”

ONE longing now interfused all Agnes' inner life. All life to her seemed comprehended within this longing. It was the longing to be again one with her husband, as she was one with him in companionship, sympathy, and love in their first year at Lotusmere, and their month at Tarnstone. She loved him no less to-day; her aching heart made her sure of that; and yet how far he was away! It could not be always thus; she was certain of it: had she not been, she must have died. A cloud, a shadow, a what was it?—could not always obscure their hearts and make their love seem dim and cold to each other. Because it could not, she could live and suffer and wait, for her husband. Life could hold no joy for her separate from him.

He was right — she knew his faults; she saw them more clearly than she knew, herself. He was no longer the god that her girlhood worshipped. He was more — he was the husband of her youth. Faults! Did she not love him more for every one she was taxed to forgive? Had he none to forgive in her? And she sighed as she remembered how often she must seem querulous, low-spirited, and unhappy, without any adequate cause. Every one's life held a cross. How many bore a heavier one than Linda was to her, meekly

and without repining ! Why did she not always smile joyously on Cyril when he came, no matter how she felt or what she might have to bear ? He could not endure unhappiness for himself, or for others. He was made for sunshine and success. Should she be his shadow — she with her weakness and weariness and pain ? If she was, she would cease to be.

In this self-searching Agnes made no allowance for the physical depressions and suffering out of which so many of her own shortcomings came. Nor was she conscious that it was only with a sense of returning health that her old bright self once more arose and spoke. Shut up in a darkened sick-room, without doubt she would be again the very Agnes that she was condemning. But at present, with a new stir of life in her veins and a thrill of returning health in her pulses, her impulse was to search through her wardrobe to find something fresh and bright that she might don for her husband's return. Was she successful ? Alas ! fashion did not halt in her transformations because Agnes was sick. Her dresses were undeniably “behind the fashion.” When she had arrayed herself in the prettiest, she looked a little quaint and “undeniably faded,” Cyril said to himself as he came up to Lotusmere early one autumn evening, and found Agnes waiting for him at the gate.

He gave a sudden start at the sight of her. He did not see her till he met her face to face, for he had come rapidly along the village street, looking up and on with an absent gaze as if in contemplation of some far-distant object.

“Why, Aggie ; how you startled me ! You are the

last person on earth I expected to meet here," he exclaimed, a scarlet flush suffusing his face. "I am astonished."

"I thought you would be," said Agnes. "But I feel so much better, Cyril! I've been thinking of you all day. And some way I thought it would seem like the dear old times, to come out and wait for you here. Does it?" — in an appealing tone.

"Indeed it does — like very old times. Why, it seems a century ago, Aggie, since you used to wait for me here in a sun hat!" and as he said these words, the image of the slender girl who used to stand there rose before him, and he involuntarily compared her with the quaint little figure and faded face of the woman now looking up into his eyes with a half-tender, half-entreating gaze.

"You think me very much changed, Cyril?" she said with a faint smile.

"Of course we have both changed, Aggie; that was six years ago, and, as I said, it seems a hundred, so much has happened since then!"

"But you are handsomer now than you were then, Cyril," she said fondly. "You look grander, more manly, stronger every way. Well, I'm going to try to improve, myself. I know that it is high time to begin," she said, with a pretty little toss of the head. "or my splendid husband will have got so far beyond me that I can never overtake him."

"What an idea!" nevertheless looking pleased at its absurdity. "Let me tell you the first thing to do, Aggie — improve the cut of your dress. Have you any idea how this one looks?"

"Ye-s," slowly, smiling, though the impulse was to cry. The artistic faculty so strong in her, with her desire to please the æsthetic eyes of her husband, made her very sensitive to her appearance. Her thought flew to the baby up-stairs, and back to the weeks and months she had spent in the darkened chamber, when the graceful robes which the daughters of earth wear in the summer air and sunshine were as useless to her as if she were wrapped already in her last cerements.

"You are right, Cyril," she said; "I have worn wrappers so long I did not know how old-fashioned my dresses had become, till I put one on. I will have them all made over, and I will buy only *one* fresh one," with emphasis, feeling like a culprit at the thought of how much she and baby had cost of late. "I will go into town with you the first morning you can take the time to help me select just the shade you prefer."

He did not seem to hear her. He was looking beyond her with a preoccupied gaze.

"What are you thinking about, Cyril? You had just that look upon your face when you came up to the gate, as if you were a thousand miles away."

"Not so far as that. I was only thinking that I must go back again to town to-night."

"Oh, no, not to-night!"

"I must, Aggie."

The short upper lip quivered, and the voice trembled, as she said, "I thought, Cyril, after the election you would not have to spend so many evenings away from home. If you only could be with us a little more! The children are not half as well acquainted with their papa as they ought to be."

"Well, is it my fault?" with a touch of sharpness in his voice. "You don't seem to consider how overwhelmed I have been with business, nor to remember that you have not been in a state to be a very joyous companion."

"But I kept saying, After the election everything will be different. Cyril will have a little time then that he can call his own, and I shall have some new life to give. I feel it coming, Cyril — a sense of new health. How good it seems just to feel something as I used to do! And I've been practicing the sweetest ballad! I was going to sing it for you to-night as a surprise. *Must* you go back, darling?"

"I must," he said, with a hot flush sweeping over his face, which some way seemed to fasten her large, clear gaze upon him, and to hold his with the spell of a new attraction. It was not new, it was a sudden out-raying of the old. The crimson "cloud" which she had thrown over her head this moment fell back, and the eyes looking up into his in the soft autumnal light were the eyes that thrilled and held his heart long ago by the old gate in Ulm. For an instant the girl Agnes stood before him. In that breath, to him the dividing years were not, and had never been. He stood alone with his love in the youth of the past. A chance look, a brief glance, with an electric flash revived life's first romance, and for the moment made it live again.

"If you really care so much about my staying, Aggie, I'll let my engagement go, and stay with you," he said tenderly, thrilling still with the beloved memory. Brief as a flash of lightning it went by, to leave him in the dark and cold of the after-thought.

"It is a positive engagement," he said, with a change in his voice.

"I must not ask you to break it then," she said with a sigh. "I must not;" her sense of honor silencing her heart. "But if you did not have to make so many engagements, Cyril,—so many,—how glad I should be! how much happier we would be! how much better it would be for us all!"

"Then I see nothing for me to do but to leave public life, and devote myself exclusively for the rest of my days to my family; that is what your exactions in reality would amount to," he said bitterly, stung to irritation by her climax, uttered as it was by a voice full of tears. "Agnes, you have not the slightest comprehension of what is expected of a public man. You may just as well begin to learn the lesson at once. A man in public life belongs to the public quite as much as he does to his wife. He must meet its requirements or go back into obscurity. Have you no ambition for me, Agnes? Would you be perfectly contented to see me stay a drudge or a clodhopper all my life?"

"No, oh no, Cyril!" she said, all contrition. "I am proud of you and of your success. I want you to have every honor your great talents will bring; but if with all we could but have a little more of the old love and happiness—just a little more of you, Cyril—I should have more than I ever dreamed could be mine."

He felt the intense irritation which always stings one into whom the truth probes deeper than the one who utters it knows or intends. He passed from the gate along the avenue toward the house, Agnes by his side, without another word.

"I must go and dress," he said as they entered the hall, he passing up to his own apartment, while Agnes went into the parlor. In the upper hall he encountered Linda.

"What a pretty piece of acting!" she said in a low voice, following him. "Lovely domestic scene! Wife waiting by the gate dressed for her husband in fashions from the ark; tempts him with pictures of conjugal felicity long gone by, that can never be resuscitated; husband almost persuaded to begin again and make a slave of himself. I have one item of advice for you, Cyril King," changing her taunting tone to one of intense earnestness: "You have just begun a new life which makes the old one impossible. You intend to succeed? Of course you do. Mark my words: you never will, unless you begin it a free man! How can you keep your popularity or power if you tie yourself down again to one woman's apron-string! Don't begin what you can't keep up. Stay at home to night to please a whim, and have a bigger scene to-morrow night because you must go out. Don't you suppose that I want you to stay as much as she! I live for you, not for myself. So I say to you, 'Go!' You will have more peace in the end, to do just as you please. If I were a man I would be my own master."

Cyril proceeded to his dressing-room to exchange his office attire for the most careful evening dress. While he was performing his toilette, Agnes' voice floated up to him with the notes of the piano, ever a soothing sound to him, no matter what his mood, and he opened his door that he might hear more distinctly. She was singing the old ballad from the German of Simon Dach

which she used to sing so often with joyous ring while he sat by her side in the first year of their marriage. He was shaving, but some way the pathetic voice, with the words it sang, made his hand a little too uncertain for that precarious operation, and he laid his razor down while Agnes went on singing "Annie of Tharaw : " —

" Annie of Tharaw, my true love of old,
She is my life, and my goods, and my gold.

" Annie of Tharaw, her heart once again
To me has surrendered in joy and in pain.

" Annie of Tharaw, my riches, my good,
Thou, O my soul, my flesh, and my blood !

" Then come the wild weather, come sleet, or come snow,
We will stand by each other, however it blow.

" Oppression and sickness, and sorrow and pain,
Shall be to our true love as links to the chain.

" As the palm-tree standeth so straight and so tall
The more the hail beats, and the more the rains fall,

" So love in our hearts shall grow mighty and strong
Through crosses, through sorrows, through manifold wrong."

A few moments later, when he came into the parlor dressed and ready to depart, Agnes, with face bent over the keys, was singing in a low voice these lines of a song from the French : —

" Love, love, what wilt thou with this heart of mine ?
Nought see I fixed or sure in thee !
I do not know thee, — nor what deeds are thine ;
Love, love, what wilt thou with this heart of mine ?
Naught see I fixed or sure in thee !

“ Shall I be mute, or vows with prayers combine ?
Ye who are blessed in loving, tell it me ;
Love, love, what wilt thou with this heart of mine ?
Naught see I permanent or sure in thee.”

“ There, Aggie, I wouldn’t sing any more of that doleful ditty,” said Cyril in a tone of affected gayety. “ One would think that you were some little love-lorn damsel, instead of a wife of more than six years. ‘ Annie of Tharaw ’ is the song for you to sing, and for me to hear ;” and as he said these words he stooped down and kissed her.

“ You won’t mind if I don’t stay to dinner to-day, will you ?” he said in a hurried way. “ I am afraid I shall be late, and my engagement is very positive.”

“ Oh, your engagement is to dine in town. I would not have you late for anything,” she said with a tender smile. His manner had not been so affectionate for many a day. For the instant she felt willing that he should go anywhere if he would part with her like that. As she looked up she noted the extreme care with which he was dressed. It certainly could be for no ordinary occasion.

“ How handsome you look, darling !” she exclaimed ; “ I wish that I were going, that I might see every one admire you — if I had a pretty dress on too, I mean, so that you need not be ashamed of me.”

“ You shall have a new dress, Aggie. Let’s see, not to-morrow, — for I shall hardly get back to-night ; it will be so late, and I should only disturb you all coming in, — but next day you can go into town with me ; we will select a pretty suit, and stay over and go to the Academy at night. I noticed this morning, it is

to be the 'Marriage of Figaro' on Thursday — no tearing tragedy, but something bright and airy. Don't you remember what a fancy you took to Cherubini?"

"Yes, and that was five years ago, just after we came back from Tarnstone. Will you go! and will you take me, Cyril?" she exclaimed in delight.

"Of course I will. And now good-by, sweetheart," and he stooped and kissed her again.

The more his conscience smote him, the more guilty he felt at the thought of deceiving her, the more he tried to make amends to himself by loving words and promises. His "good-by, sweetheart," thrilled the deepest chord in her love: it was the refrain of their favorite song, the one that she had sung over and over and over to him in their lover-days. She lifted her face and kissed him, then turning to the piano touched the keys, and in an instant her sweet voice floated out, bearing on its melody the beloved words of the past: —

"Good-by, sweetheart!

I leave thee with all purest things,
That when some fair temptation sings
Its luring song, though sore beset,
Thou'lt stronger be. Then no regret,
Life-long, will follow after thee.
With touches lighter than the air,
I kiss thy forehead brave and fair,
And say to God this last deep prayer:
'Oh guard him always, night and day,
So from thy peace he shall not stray!'
And so good-by, sweetheart!"

He lingered. Years had come and gone since he had listened to these words. In an instant he was conscious that it was another man in thought and feeling

who heard them last. Now, he could not bear it. Before Agnes had reached the final line the front door closed, and he was gone.

As she arose and went to the window to look after him, why was it that a wild, thrilling cry almost burst from her inmost heart, and an impulse prompted her to pursue him, to call him, to hold him back from that great, vague, dreadful world into which he was going?

"Am I insane?" she asked herself, as holding down alike cry and impulse she turned in silence — not to the piano, but to go to her children.

"Where's my papa? Where's my handsome papa?" asked little Cyril.

"Papa had to go directly back to town," said his mother.

"What for?" asked the child-investigator.

"Papa is very busy, darling. When he comes back to-morrow, you shall have on your pretty new suit, and you must run to meet him and tell him how glad you are to see him."

"He not glad to see me. He don't say so," said the boy.

"But he is glad to see you, darling. Only dear papa is so busy he can't always stop to tell it. You have nothing else to do, and can say so as well as not. And I don't know another little boy who has such a handsome, grand papa as little Cyril."

"Does he love you, mamma?"

"Yes, darling, yes."

"Then why don't he take you too? I love you, and so I want you wid me."

"But I am going with papa the next time he goes

to town. Papa is busy there, mamma is busy here; that is why I don't go every day. What makes you think of such things, darling?"

"'Cause I heard Auntie Linda say, if my papa loved my mamma he'd take her — and I was mad."

In the first half of his brief ride into New York, Cyril felt his thoughts drawn backward.

"Good-by, sweetheart!

I leave thee with all purest things."

These words, borne on a tender voice, filled his brain with their pleading refrain. He did not wish himself back, — surely not, — but he wished that Agnes had taken another time to sing those verses, and another time to devote herself so exclusively to him, and to look so appealing and so pathetic. The remembrance of her made him uncomfortable, and he had especial reasons, this evening, for wishing to feel perfectly satisfied with himself.

But as he entered upon the last half of his ride, that which was behind moved him less than that which was before. The pale face bending over the piano grew dim, while another face, lustrous with expectancy and welcome, smiled upon him and lured him on through the darkness. By the time he reached the outer guard of lamps stretching their chains of light, set with glimmering stars, for miles on miles through the great city, it seemed to him that he could not wait to reach his place of destination. A few moments later he stood upon the threshold of the abode that he sought, waiting with heightened pulse a response to the door-bell. It was one of those houses now almost obliterated

from the closely set centres of the metropolis. Then the encroaching city had not reached it in "solid blocks," but though far within its limits had left it standing square and stately within its own ample grounds. It fronted a broad avenue on which its great windows, all aglow with warm hangings and gleaming lights, looked out like so many bright and inviting eyes.

Cyril King entered a hall broad and lofty enough to be called a saloon. Its walls were hung with immense paintings, all of the French and Italian schools. Antique vases stood in its niches, and marble statues in its alcoves. Its carpet was of the texture and tint of turf, the softest emerald to the eyes and velvet to the feet, and the illusion of nature was carried out by a central fountain which threw up its crystal spray in the golden light, encircled by a wall of moss, all set with blooming plants nourished by the moisture of the fountain and by the sunshine which in the day fell upon them from a central glass dome high above.

The white-gloved servant who opened the door for Cyril received his card upon a silver salver, and after hesitating an instant, said, "Mrs. Sutherland bade me say to Mr. King that he would find her in the library."

Thus unannounced and unattended Cyril passed through the great drawing-rooms into a third apartment, a smaller room, whose windows overlooked the grounds, and which opened by sliding doors into a conservatory. The effect was the same as if one end of the room was open to a summer garden; in this a fountain plashed, exotics bloomed, and birds sang, while the whole suite of rooms was permeated with fragrance of its flowers almost to oppression.

The library itself was lined with small ebony book-cases, surmounted by busts and pictures, and divided by mirrors, like panels, which reached to the lofty ceiling. The furniture and window-hangings were of gold-colored satin embroidered with green; the carpet, like that of the hall, seemed of May-time turf, only sprinkled with delicate flowers. Every form of beauty that wealth and the most luxurious taste could bring together seemed to meet here. Bronzes and statuettes, airy vases and antique carvings, rare books and rarer pictures; all blended in the garniture of this room. Nothing that could feed the eyes or satisfy the senses had been left out, even to the swinging lamp of **costly** spices distilling its subtle fragrance overhead.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE AFFINITY CLUB.

THE occupant of the room, as she advanced to meet Cyril, seemed but a fairer outgrowth of it, so in harmony was she with all its soft light, luxury, and fragrance.

"You *have* come!" she exclaimed in childlike accents and a voice that was music's own, as she extended her hand and led him to a *tête-à-tête*. "So good of you to come at all! especially to come before the other guests, when you live at such a distance and are so driven by engagements. Do you know how I appreciate your kindness?"

The utterance was commonplace enough, but nothing could be further removed from commonplace than the speaker, or her manner. Of the latter no adequate impression can be given in words. The most delicate flattery, welcome, homage, all commingled in the half-tender, fully sweet vibration of the voice as it uttered the last sentence.

If all these were true of the voice, tenfold more were true of the eyes. They were wonderful eyes in their place, though they can shine but dimly on the printed page. Fatal eyes they were, but not more fatal to others than to herself. Jet black, they had no beady brightness, but a velvet softness that melted till the pupil was suffused and lost in its dilating lustre. Hair

of the same hue, rich and waving, fell back naturally from the face, and was coiled about the small head. Two ebon arches marked the perfect brow, and from the shadow of eyes and hair the white face was defined with almost dazzling effect. There was no pallor in the creamy skin; it had all the transparency which painters seek and worship. In tint it was that of a magnolia petal laid upon a rose-leaf; through the clear olive flushed the underlying and ever uprising rose. The mouth was childlike, almost infantile in expression, and the short, delicate nose above it made the story that it told complete. Not so the figure, almost tall and slight, all curves and roundness; yet when it was drawn to its full height it fulfilled the ideal of feminine majesty. It suggested no majesty now. Grace radiated from every line and movement. She wore what few brunettes dare essay, a dress of pale green, which sheathed her perfect figure as a calyx does its flower. It was of clinging India silk, and the fresh, soft face above it needed no relief from its "trying color," beyond the heirloom lace which fell from throat and arms. A bunch of mignonnette and tea-rose buds sent forth their fragrance from her belt. A diamond glittered in the lace at the throat, and on her hand an emerald, the only jewels that she wore.

"Pardon me," said Cyril, in the silence which fell upon them after their first greetings, "but I never saw such an emerald. What flashes! Most people prefer diamonds; but the emerald has a peculiar fascination for me. It is a diamond, but more; for it has color and warmth as well as brilliancy. I like it because it is so living, so electric."

"How delightful that it has such a charm for you. for it is *my* stone, and was my mother's."

"Indeed!"

"I mean that it is my birth-stone, the gem for May I was born in May, and so was my mother."

"Why, then it is my stone as well, for I was born in May."

"Your stone! Do you know its language? An emerald means 'success in love.' Even in its significance you see it is more — more human than the diamond. It is touched with the power of passion. The diamond is cold and represents only the primeval element of innocence."

"You are wise in a lore of which I am ignorant," said Cyril, his eyes still following the ray of emerald fire which flashed from the snowy finger.

"It is because my mother had a passion for gems, and every one that she owned had its story as well as its language. They were all to be mine. So when I was a little girl she would empty her casket into her lap, and taking up each jewel, one by one, would tell me its history — and its prophecy."

"This emerald had both?"

"Yes, both. It was her talisman, now it is mine."

"Happy emerald," said Cyril with a sigh.

A silence, broken by a sudden, soft exclamation, "Ah, the pictures! I had forgotten that I promised to tell you about them — when and where I chose each one. I can do that now, but to study them properly you must see them by daylight," and Circe Sutherland led the way into a room adjoining, filled with pictures. "All French paintings, you see. I go to the cradle

of my race for my art. I have nothing to say against the Flemish, Italian, or even pre-Raphaelite schools ; but each nature must be fed by its own. It is only the soul of French painting which satisfies me to my finest fibre. The sense of art, you know, is born with one ; it cannot be acquired. The special school that we choose is a matter of temperament and race, is it not ? just as our favorite author is. The mob, I know, prefer the Italian ; but the mob is a universal parrot, that always echoes and never thinks."

"I am your pupil," said Cyril humbly. "Save through feeling I know nothing about art. I know what I like, but am never certain just why I like it. I have had immense feeling for one or two pictures in my life;" and as he spoke he saw not the gorgeous paintings on the wall, but another, a picture hanging leagues away, showing the luminous sand, the low bars of cloud, the floating gulls, distinctly before his eyes; and a hot flush of color smote the pallor of his face.

It was but for an instant. In another the eyes followed the delicate hand lifted to the walls. They followed on and on, pausing, then moving onward again, as she pointed out each special treasure, some inherited, some chosen by herself beyond the Atlantic, each a treasure of treasures at least to its owner. Here were Watteaus and Greuzes; the glowing scenery of Patel ; the tragic life-figures of David ; the masterpieces of Horace Vernet, Ingrès, Delaroche, and the warm landscapes of Claude Lorraine.

"You see, you cannot do them justice by gas-light ; you must come in the daytime, if you care to study

them," said Circe Sutherland, leading the way into the drawing-room, which was as much a museum of art as the smaller room. Had he ever seen them it would have recalled to Cyril more than one salon in the Palazzo Pitti, but he only knew that in its adornment it was more exquisite than any apartment he had ever beheld. Its windows were draped with curiously wrought antique lace, its walls hung with pale rose-colored silk, against which stood in fair relief faultless forms in marble, great vases of Russian malachite, cabinets of ebony carved in the era of the *renaissance*, and stands of Florentine mosaics inlaid with pearl and *lapis lazuli*. Trinkets from Rome and Naples, wrought in coral, lava, and alabaster, lined the cabinets and were profusely scattered about, while lofty mirrors repeated all the beauty and splendor of the apartment from end to end.

"You promised to play for me," said Cyril.

"I am but too happy to do so, if there is time before dinner," was the answer, as she seated herself before the instrument.

It was not necessary to be scientifically musical one's self, to appreciate the music of Circe Sutherland. If she had the lightness and strength of touch combined which produce brilliancy of execution, she had so much more in her voice that her really remarkable playing seemed a secondary accomplishment.

As her notes rose upon the air Cyril felt as if they were taking his breath away, they conveyed to him a meaning so much more profound than either the music or the words contained. It was the wonderful voice itself which pervaded him with a something more than

was in the song, yet the song was full of human pathos and passion, uttered with all the fervor and liquid assonance of the South. Her voice was like herself, unworn, untouched by time or sorrow, flexile, mellow, and sympathetic to an extraordinary degree. Nothing could surpass the sweetness of its quality. The listener soon became unconscious of its power in the sensation of ineffable softness and passion which it expressed. It was more than her music, it was herself that she impressed upon you through the marvellous organ of her voice.

It seemed to Cyril that he was dreaming, for through this voice which so pervaded him, or beyond it, he knew not which, he seemed to hear another voice, faint and far as a linnet's, compared with this new one which thrilled him so — and yet he heard it all too distinctly for his own peace. Across the passionate love-song which filled his senses smote the words,—

“Love, love, what wilt thou with this heart of mine?
Naught see I fixed or sure in thee!
I do not know thee, — nor what deeds are thine;
Love, love, what wilt thou with this heart of mine?
Naught see I fixed or sure in thee!”

A face in a door, a sudden call to dinner,—what mischief they have prevented at one time and another!

The liveried servant who now made the announcement, with the most commonplace face and voice, brought Cyril back to his common-sense, and saved him from any visible sign of emotion as he offered his arm to the enchantress, and in sufficiently conventional terms expressed his thanks for the pleasure she had given him in allowing him to listen to her voice.

"What fortune and fame you would have won if fate had been less lavish in her gifts to you, and you had made music your profession," he said.

"Fate has made it more than a profession ; she has made it my life," she replied.

They crossed the hall to the dining-room on the other side, and there, waiting at the head of the table, was a lady to whom Circe introduced Cyril as her "Aunt Jessie."

The dining-room also opened into the conservatory, and the music of birds and the perfume of flowers floated over them as they sat down. The table garnished with flowers, laden with gold plate, with the rarest Sèvres and Limoges china and with mediæval Venetian glass, filled with satisfaction Cyril's beauty-loving sight ; while the dinner — one of the daily triumphs of the old French cook who had pampered Circe Sutherland's palate from babyhood — seemed to him to surpass anything that he had ever before tasted. The rich paintings on the wall, the songs of the free canaries, the floating fragrance of the flowers, the noiseless servitor behind his chair, the epicurean viands, the beautiful woman, the low caressing tones of her voice ; all seemed to Cyril but the blending parts of one unrounding and overflowing symphony.

They sat long at the table. Hurry, either in action or atmosphere, had never entered into this abode. When they entered the drawing-room the guests had already begun to assemble, and were scattered in little knots about the room, chatting, looking over engravings, music, or the innumerable curiosities everywhere disposed. Circe Sutherland made no apology for

being a few moments late. She glided in and out among her guests, recognizing every person with a greeting so personal and winning that each one received the impression that he or she was an especially welcome guest.

It was not a formal party, but an informal reunion, one that gathered weekly in the drawing-room of Circe Sutherland. It was a fashionable assembly, but it was something beside. A distinctly marked intellectual and artistic element was visible amid all the languor and grace and dazzling raiment which usually defines the "queens of society." These, with the "dancing gentlemen," often indulged in their favorite pastime in the *salle de danse* above, which was always provided with music and always open; but the majority of the denizens of this rich and popular house preferred the music and philosophic discourse of the drawing-rooms. It was in fact a club that assembled here; but it was never named. It should have been called the Affinity Club; and yet perhaps any one of its members would have disdained such a title. Many members of that club still live to gather the fruit, the seeds of which they there sowed, but each would have refused to be classed under such a name.

They represented many and even conflicting avocations in life; nevertheless one bond of consanguinity bound them all. They were all malcontents, all protesters in greater or less degree against the accepted order of things. No two, perhaps, wanted the same thing, but they all wanted something (many for the life of them could not have told what) that they had not. Many others sighed and murmured in flowery phrase

that they longed to be free ; free to pursue their ideal ; “ free to worship and to love the good, the beautiful, and the true wherever they found it.” “ The good, the beautiful, and the true ” was their best-beloved and oftenest-murmured phrase ; a pretty phrase, but what it really meant to them many would have been puzzled to tell. “ Freedom ” was what their souls demanded — “ free thought,” “ free action,” “ free love ! ” That this freedom led legitimately into the land of license no one admitted to himself. Why should he ? All that he thought he wanted was “ his ideal,” — his ideal in life, in love, in action. What right had “ society,” “ custom,” “ unthinking public opinion,” to trammel him in his pursuit of the “ good, the beautiful, the true ! ” “ None whatever.”

This was the private individual opinion of each member of the Affinity Club ; an opinion very likely confined to its native breast everywhere save in the house of Circe Sutherland. There it was free to fly and disport itself as the canaries in her conservatory. Not that it flew far, or sang loudly, even here. It sighed, perhaps ; it sang sweetly and softly ; it wore the plumage of art, of music, of literature, of philosophy, of free thought, and was soothing and seductive in all.

What it could never be in Circe Sutherland’s house was to be common or vulgar. How could it be, compounded of such elements as met and mingled here ! Here was a young poet whose life-long misfortune it was to be that he seized fame at a single leap, but the sun had not yet ripened and revealed the rottenness of his premature fruit ; here was a great preacher on whose god-like genius the recording angel had not yet traced

the ineffaceable record of his spiritual fall; here was a mighty editor, simple and single-minded as a child, whose virgin soul was destined to hold him safe amid all vagaries, to the end; here were journalists, restless, acute, and brilliant; artists, self-conscious, self-satisfied, yet rich in power; actors, famous, tempted, sinned against, forgiving much; philosophers, some whose brains were as seedy as their coats, some who had almost started "the perpetual motion," and many who had missed the philosopher's stone. Here were men who, disappointed in marriage, delighted to say to the right auditor that "marriage as a legal bond would soon be outgrown" by the world, that the millennium of "the soul-marriage" was close at hand. Here were sentimental women, who, "soul-weary" of their plodding and expectorating lords, whispered in the ears of their bosom friend, a woman, that they dared not look up, as they walked, lest they should behold their "ideal," — only to rush madly on to ruin, or to sink back into eternal misery at having missed him.

But beside these specially gifted and dangerous people, here were the delicious singer; the graceful dancer; the pretty, lisping talker of small talk; the "perfect beauty" who had no need to think or to do — her contribution to the world's joy was simply to be; the pleasant procession of people all curves, gliding in and out among the people of angles, without once jarring, but because of these very curves so merged into each other that they left but faint individual trace behind them. These were not conscious members of the Affinity Club. They were simply the pretty moths of society who naturally flew into the soft light of Circe

Sutherland's house. They did it with perfect impunity. Its rays were not of the scorching quality that would singe their wings. Its subdued lights, its subtle fragrance, distilled danger only for dissatisfied souls.

CHAPTER XIV.

AGNES AT THE OPERA : CIRCE SUTHERLAND.

THOSE who have been graduated from a contriving school rarely outlive the result. Pinching poverty in youth projects its trace into later life, leaving its victims to betray it according to their dispositions. Some show it in lavish expenditure, vulgar display ; others in small, pinching economies when such economies have ceased to be necessary.

Agnes, in her girlhood the dependent on proud but not over-rich relations, could not remember the time when she had not "to contrive" in order to make her scanty wardrobe pretty as well as cheap. She early learned with deft fingers to turn garments upside down, inside out, to rip, to renovate, and to make over "good as new." She had by no means escaped the feeling that this must be done still. With his past indelibly stamped upon brain and heart, she could not disassociate from Cyril the idea of impending want. He was poor when she married him. He was not rich now. The ample income derived from his profession had been sorely taxed by the expenses of his election and the never-ceasing demands of political life. She had been long sick — and the baby ! Babies were expensive blessings, there was no denying that. The future was uncertain, and — "I must deny myself," said Agnes at

the conclusion of her meditation on what the new dress should be. It must be strong enough to bear some wear and tear, fine enough to be seen in the city, sober enough to be not out of place on the cars, and not expensive. All these unaffiliating qualities were to meet in one garment, for with their present expenses, she thought she could not afford two.

All this was settled in Agnes' mind, before she sat with Cyril on the upper floor of Stewart's, surveying the costumes with which, in endless varieties, an obliging salesman was draping the staring "form" before her.

"Anything that really satisfies one's taste is sure to be beyond one's means," said Agnes to Cyril. "To find anything that will do for street-dress, reception-dress, and evening-dress all in one, will be impossible, I fear. This silver gray poplin is elegant. I want it, Cyril, because you like it; but if I get it, I'll have to buy another to save it. On the whole, don't you think I had better take this plain black silk? It won't look out of place anywhere, and will be good enough for any occasion where I shall be likely to wear it."

"You don't forget that you are going to Washington, do you?"

"Oh, no. But it does not seem as if I should go out much there. Do you think I will, Cyril?"

"I'm sure I don't know. You won't unless you grow more lively than you have been lately. But do decide on something, Aggie, for I must get down to the office."

How could she tell him that she felt a half-sickening fear to decide on anything, lest it should cost too

much,— more than he could just now afford, more than he would feel willing to pay. And the thought struck through her with a pang, as it does through many women's hearts: "Why haven't I something my very own! then I would buy both dresses, and please him."

Cyril thought of telling her to buy the two; but the after-thought, ever ready, reminded him that his funds were rather low; yet it did not remind him also that they had been lowered by new and unwonted expenses in which his family had no share. By this time he was dreadfully bored. What delighted him in dress was its effect; the process by which that effect might be reached worried him, as it does most men. He liked to see a lady glide before him as harmonious to his eyes as her music might be melodious to his hearing, but of the care and pains that wrought that harmony, the choosing and cost of it, he wished to know nothing; if he did, it was harmony no longer.

He had praised the silver gray costume so unreservedly, that Agnes wanted it just for the pleasure it would give his eyes. "If he could only tell me to take both, for the gray would be of no service alone," she said to herself. He did not, so she resolutely turned her eyes from it, and in a low voice told the salesman that she would take the black silk.

The momentous question decided, Cyril accompanied her to a picture gallery. Her intention was to spend the remainder of the day going in and out among the few artists' studios and art galleries that she knew, looking over books and engravings. Later in the afternoon Cyril was to meet her at Goupil's: then they were going to the Brevoort, where she was to don the new silk, dine with Cyril, and then — the opera.

It was an epoch in Agnes' days when she could go to the opera. There was no affectation in her love for it. She was conscious of the ludicrous aspect of singing certain sentences which could so much better be said, nevertheless she enjoyed the opera with a childish zest. With its lights, melody, flowers, and gala dresses, to her it meant how much more — youth, romance, love! In the heyday of these she visited it first. In the first month of her marriage she saw for the first time the interior of the Academy of Music. It opened upon her unaccustomed eyes like a temple of enchantment. To her, a neophyte in the gay world's delights, every object which she contemplated gave her the pleasant thrill of a new sensation: the boxes rising tier on tier, with their curtains of lace and amber satin looped back to show the bedecked and living beauty within; the rose-tinted galleries upborne by white goddesses, packed with people to the lofty ceiling; the fluttering audience about her; the shimmer of fans; the running ripple of talk; the melodious boy-voices in the aisles, calling out "Opera-book!" "Buy an opera-book!" the flower venders moving and peering up and down — one in particular, an old Italian, his hands crowded with his fragrant merchandise, regulation bouquets of red and white which never varied. How these sights and sounds had stamped themselves upon her impressionable brain, she never knew till in hours of convalescence they came thronging in upon her memory, and through the darkened room floated the boy-voices calling "Opera-book!" the swell of the orchestra, "Martha's" "Last Rose of Summer," the music of "Norma," the airy songs of Cherubini. while she inhaled again the subtle

flower-scent wafted from the old Italian's hand. All these had been hers in the dimness of her chamber, when 't had seemed as if she could never enter the bright Academy again; yet here she was.

No shadow had fallen upon that day. The autumnal splendor of the metropolitan streets had given her a new sense of buoyancy, till she fancied she felt like Guido's Aurora moving above the clouds. The new pictures had fed her æsthetic sense, the new books she found had filled her mind with new thoughts and emotions. Not least, the black silk suit had proved itself a marvel, did not fit ill, and had received Cyril's approval. She had dined alone *tête-à-tête* with him, and here she was by his side, — the glow, the splendor, the murmur and music of the Academy about her once more.

All the burden of life seemed at once to roll from her heart. She was Agnes Darcy, the girl, again. She knew no doubt nor fear, nor anything but bliss beside her lover.

"Oh, Cyril!" she whispered, "I know that it is ridiculous, but I believe my idea of perfect happiness is to forget every pain and be with you at the opera."

"After all, what a child you are, Aggie!" with a touch of superiority in the tone.

"That's what I'd like to be always. It tires me so, makes me feel so old, to think and to feel."

"On dreary subjects — yes. If you'd only devote more time to agreeable themes."

"I'll try — I'll try, Cyril."

"That's right; that's what you ought to do" — with a sudden turn of his head and a swift change of countenance.

"What — what *is* the matter, darling? you look as if you were going to faint."

"But I'm not;" after an instant's pause, "I've had a number of such turns lately," and he spoke the truth. "It's gone now. Thank Heaven, there's the bell;" and the curtain rose. There was the scene so well remembered: the chamber in Count Almaviva's castle, Figaro measuring the room, Susanna trimming a hat with flowers. With many touches of healthy sentiment, "The Marriage of Figaro," like the majority of operas, is far from being wholly pure in tone. But Agnes did not know it. She did not follow the libretto, nor always understand the action. She would shut her eyes and listen to the music; it was all in all to her. When the curtain fell at the close of Figaro's song, she opened her eyes and came back as from another world, to look around the old one.

"Cyril, it must be imagination," she said, "but it seems as if that lady, that one in the first box to the right, — how beautiful she is! — is aiming her glass straight at me. It must be a fancy. Of course she can't be looking at little me in all this dazzling throng, but she has seemed to be, so long, I can't help speaking of it. Isn't it strange, Cyril, that it should seem so?"

"She is looking, Aggie, directly here," said Cyril, making an effort to speak naturally. "Strange I did not see her sooner. She is Mrs. Sutherland, who visits at Mrs. Beckman's. I was introduced to her there. I must go and speak to her before the curtain rises. Amuse yourself with the libretto, Aggie. You know how often I have told you that you ought to read it;" and before she could take in what he had said, he **was** gone, and she sat alone.

In a moment he appeared in the conspicuous box whose occupants were visible from every part of the house. The central object in it was a lady whose white Turkish mantle, embroidered with gold, was thrown back, revealing gauze-veiled arms, shoulders, and throat gleaming with jewels. She wore a small tiara of brilliants in her hair, which flashed out afar. She sat like a queen amid courtiers and her aspect was royal. But not more so than Cyril's, for whom now all others made way. There was another lady in the box, an elderly one, to whom the remaining gentlemen addressed themselves while Cyril seated himself by the beauty's side.

Agnes, alone, with no one to speak to, tried to fix her eyes on the libretto in her hand, but could not; they would rise to the sight that confronted her! Could that man be Cyril, who a moment before had sat so silent by her side. He was radiant with animation now. What a pair they made, he and the unknown beauty. Poor Agnes! she could not help seeing that also. Who could help seeing it? Not many, as was proven by the innumerable glasses directed toward the box. The whole Academy outside could not show so superb a pair.

"How handsome he is!" said Agnes as she gazed, while her breath seemed going. She marked the broad, lofty shoulders and the haughty head with its rings of closely clinging yellow hair; the keenly cut features; the eyes flashing like sapphires. And she — this woman beside him! Why had God made her so beautiful? The masses of purple black hair; the magnolia skin with its rose-leaf tinge; the long, drooping, heavily

fringed eye-lids, with the eyes half lifted, large, black, and alluringly soft — she saw all, for her glass was lifted now, though she was unconscious when she did it. “Such eyes, melting on him, on Cyril, my husband! And he! He looks as if there were not another on earth but she. Why did I come here? was it for this?” And Agnes’ glass fell from her hand, while the great Academy and the vast throng swam before her eyes like a wreck at sea, and she drifted out with it, where, she knew not, cared not.

“Pray, is the lady whom you have just left Mrs. King? If so, I trust we are soon to become acquainted. It is scarcely fair that I should know her husband so much better than I do herself,” said Circe Sutherland.

“Yes, that is Mrs. King;” with visible embarrassment. “This is the first time that she has been able to visit the Academy in a long time. If you should ever favor Lotusport with another visit, it will give her great pleasure to call upon you.”

“Oh, can’t I call upon her in the morning, before she leaves town? Why didn’t you send me word that she was in town, naughty man? Then I could have called to-day, and had the happiness of your both spending the night at Sutherland house.”

“Because it had been so long since she had been able to get into town, she had commissions which kept her out all day, and you would have missed her,” said Cyril, with the fact obtruding itself into his mind that until afternoon Agnes had no dress in which he would have thought her presentable to Circe Sutherland.

Now he glanced into the parquette, where she sat

such a little way off, still trying to obey his wish, with her face bent over the libretto. How plain she looked ! how much plainer in her dark attire than any who surrounded her. He was sorry now that he had not told her to get the pearl gray dress with its satin trimmings ; that would have shone out and reflected a little lustre upon her, and with a bright ribbon would have given some color. Now her dress was lady-like, certainly, but how dark and dull. How utterly without "air" she looked, sitting there ! And she was his wife, and must be looked at and judged as such.

Only he had not the slightest expectation that she would be looked up and judged by Circe Sutherland — not that night. Because he heard Mrs. Sutherland say that "The Marriage of Figaro" was on the "off night," and because he knew that on the "off night" she seldom bestowed upon the Academy the splendor of her presence, he had chosen that evening as the one in which to take Agnes.

He saw the enchantress the instant she entered the box. What a start it gave him. How the color fled from his face, and Agnes saw it go. How suddenly the Academy and all the world was changed for him in the light of this one presence.

He lingered till the last moment. But seconds to him, his absence seemed hours to Agnes. Her will kept her from fainting ; had this been weaker, when the very Titans and goddesses sprang from their foundations, and with their tiers on tiers of humanity shot into space, she would have passed into unconsciousness and have made "a scene" for which Cyril would never have forgiven her. The knowledge that he never

would, doubled her self-control, but did not deaden her misery.

He was doing no unusual thing. The aisles and boxes were full of gentlemen who had left their seats to "pay their respects" to their friends. Many of these did not accompany ladies; those who did left their companions laughing and chatting with acquaintances. But she was alone. In all the vast assembly she recognized no one. There was nobody to come and speak with her. She must not look at them again; she could not, she thought, without fainting and attracting painful attention to herself. She was mistaken. For as she tried again to follow the words of the libretto the letters all ran together, and she could not distinguish one sentence from another, while some fatal fascination seemed to draw her eyelids upward and to fix her gaze upon the two in the box. Will quelled emotion. Passion faded from perception, leaving it unerring in its gaze.

"Linda has made me unhappy," said the prescient spirit; "I now behold for the first time the woman who has the power in herself to rob me utterly. I *know* it."

The curtain had risen upon the antechamber in the castle, and the countess, sitting alone, was singing her doleful ditty, —

"Couldst thou, Love, one hope restore me,
Calmed were sorrow, and lulled my sigh.
Teach a spouse the faith he swore me,
Or an outcast heart to die,"

when Cyril returned to his vacant seat. He had expected to see a deprecating face, silent, slow-dropping

tears; and was all ready to meet them with his most annihilating manner and tone. Instead, he saw a stony face such as he had never seen before on Agnes. Her features looked gray, pinched, and shrunken, as if she had grown years older in a few moments. She asked no questions, made no allusions to the one he had left, even when the curtain fell at the second act.

Cyril felt at once that his premeditated grandeur of manner went for naught, and that he was placed at disadvantage. Agnes did not act at all like a child, as he expected. She neither cried nor accused him; thus he had no excuse for reprimanding her. She was cold, cold as a stone; that at least was an offense.

"I see that you are offended, Aggie," he said. "You can't be such a little rustic as to be angry because I went between acts to speak with a friend. See! there is scarcely a gentleman in his seat. In Europe the fall of the curtain is a signal for every man to rise and gaze about, or to go off to chat with his friends, leaving his wife to do the same."

"Perhaps, unfortunately, your wife could not do the same," said Agnes.

"Well, you could if you hadn't been sick so much, and eternally shut away from everybody. But for Heaven's sake don't look so! you are a sight for everybody, with such an ashen face!" exclaimed Cyril, tortured with the consciousness that Circe Sutherland's lozgette was that instant turned upon them. He was also conscious that Agnes had deeper cause for pain than his mere absence from her in the box, and this consciousness made him conciliatory.

"Let me tell you about Mrs. Sutherland, Aggie;

then you will be more reasonable. She is a good friend to me — really did more than you can realize to insure my election. She was in Lotusport, visiting Mrs. Beekman when you were sick ; so you could not meet her. She spoke very kindly of you just now — wants to call upon you and to become acquainted with you."

"I don't wish to become acquainted with her."

"Then it will be your own loss, Aggie. You see how beautiful she is. She has musical genius, and a voice that I never heard equalled. She might have made fame and fortune in opera, if she had wanted either. When you hear her sing your ire will vanish."

"Where is her husband?"

"He is dead. He was her first cousin, and bore the same name. She was married to him when she was fifteen, by her father, in order to combine two estates. Her father was a Scotchman, a younger son of the great Scotch family. He went to New Orleans and into trade. Her mother was a Creole, a great heiress and beauty. *She* is all a Creole — all curves and softness ; the effect of climate as well as temperament. She grew up in a Southern atmosphere. She has never known anything but wealth and luxury. Of our drudging American life she has no comprehension."

"I think she shows that in her face," said Agnes calmly, turning her eyes toward the box and passively surveying its central occupant.

"Yes, she is a perfect Creole," Cyril went on, waxing fluent and almost happy at Agnes' apparent acquiescence, "always lingering in the past, yet perfectly conscious of the present ; full of sentiment, yet alert in perception ; soft in temperament, and vivacious in

response, with eyes for form and color never surpassed, and that sense of art which is instinct, for it can only be born in one."

"Where did you become so well acquainted with this lady? at Mrs. Beekman's?"

I met her there frequently, and — I have called at her house in New York."

"Oh! she lives in New York?" And Agnes' mind, acutely alert, went back to the Tuesday evening before, with absolute certainty now, that Cyril's "important business" and "positive engagement" was at Mrs. Sutherland's house.

"Yes, she has a house in New York, and since the death of her father, mother, and husband, she has lived there chiefly, with her aunt, the other lady in the box. But she often goes South, and has spent years in Europe, studying music and art. She is passionately fond of France, the home of her mother's ancestors."

"She looks as I fancy French women whom I have read about did — the women who lived for pleasure even in art."

"It is your Puritan mind that judges her this moment. *She* could not be a Puritan in aspect; I doubt if she could in any phase comprehend one. When you meet her, through your æsthetic nature you will like her, Aggie."

"I shall *never* like her, Cyril; *you* know that is impossible. I couldn't if I would. I — I am afraid of her!" and suddenly the cold still voice quivered again with its burden of unshed tears.

Late as it was when the opera ended, Cyril and Agnes took the midnight train home.

“Poor little mouse!” murmured Circe Sutherland, repeating unconsciously in her waking midnight dream upon her luxurious couch the ejaculation of Evelyn Dare in the front door of her log-house. “Poor, half-dead little mouse! what a stony stare she gave me. I’m sure I wish her no harm. I’d rather *not* hurt her. But how preposterous for *such* a woman to suppose that she can possess wholly *such* a man. The sooner she finds out that she cannot, and makes up her mind to bear it, the better it will be for her.”

CHAPTER XV.

CIRCE SUTHERLAND : OLD WASHINGTON.

CYRIL KING's personal opinion of Circe Sutherland was correct, but Agnes' moral estimate of her was still more acutely accurate. Each looked upon her and judged her from such opposite angles of vision that neither could perceive in her spiritually what the other saw.

She certainly was not one of an average type in the society in which she now found herself. It pleased her to recognize in herself an object unusual amid the special human developments which surrounded her. Nevertheless she was the purely natural flower and fruit of the race and life out of which she was born. Into the restless, dazzling atmosphere of a Northern metropolis she brought the languor, the repose, the softness of the far South. But she brought something more. Brain currents from the strong, harsh, metaphysical race of the North, — her father's race, — modified by temperament, climate, education, by the preponderance of a softer and more sensuous race in her veins, nevertheless made themselves perpetually and unmistakably felt in the action of her clear and subtle brain. All a Creole in temperament and tastes, she was anything but a Creole in absolute thought-power. Because she thought and comprehended so powerfully

what she desired and enjoyed was the central reason why she enjoyed so much and so keenly, and on her own plane possessed such power to create and to increase the enjoyments of others.

When had she lived for anything but self-indulgence? Never. Indulgence, satisfaction in beauty, music, art, luxury, conquest, — had not these been to her as to her mother, and to many mothers before her, at once the aim and fulfillment of existence? Her father's blood had added only strength and zest to these qualities, in the primal directions. Her childhood and first youth had been one unbroken dream of pleasure. In the imperial summer life on the great plantation, in the winter life in the southern capital wherein she was born, she knew naught but the ministry of slaves, the felicity of being idolized, the pursuits and fulfilment of pleasure through all the infinite forms which great wealth lavishes on its possessors.

The events of her days were the siesta, the bath, the toilette, the evening drive, the theatre, the opera, music, poetry, and fiction. Her maid dressed her, served her faintest wish, read to her; and when she dreamed, asleep or awake, she did so to the play of the great fountain in the inner court, and in airs laden with melody, warmth, and fragrance. The problems of destiny, the struggles of daily outer life, the pursuit of knowledge, are as unknown to the Creole woman as to her infant child. Even the inevitable sorrows of human existence are softened to her, as they are to but few of her sisters.

In her own home Circe Sutherland's life and development were but those of the many. Her marriage at

sixteen wrought no change in her lot. It was the union of an old name and a great estate, rather than of a girl and boy who knew little of each other, and cared less. Circe was to have the estate, and Duncan Sutherland had the name, which her father wished her to carry through life unchanged.

It was a brief marriage. At eighteen Circe Sutherland was a widow and an orphan, with life, the world, and a fortune before her. Pretty but unformed at sixteen, at eighteen it was but the dawn of that transcendent loveliness of person which afterwards made her snare and her fame. Her fortune, vested in perpetual funds, and in the care of trustees, yielded her a great revenue; and by a provision of her father's will, his sister, her Aunt Jessie, was made her companion and personal guardian as long as she remained unmarried. Marriage was not in the programme which she made mentally for herself, in her dreams under the magnolia trees by the fountain in the inner court of the old house in New Orleans.

When she left the convent at fifteen, she accompanied her father to Europe, where she met for the first time her large-jawed, high cheek-boned cousin Duncan. Scotland was not her native air; she shuddered and shivered till she got away from it. Still there flowed in her veins some of the blood which coursed through the pulses of one enchanting ancestress, whose beauty and whose wiles made her famous even at the court of Louis the Grand. Another race, another climate, a freer age, had given a delicacy, a softness, a subtlety, to the descendant's beauty, which the ancestress had not. She was all that the earlier Circe was, but more. The

primeval elements of each nature were the same. She came to France as to her home. Was it not the birth-place and cradle of her mother's race, the sanctuary of their dust? Paris only repeated for her, on a much ampler and more æsthetic scale, the life that had been hers from birth — the French life of her French mother. She left it with regret and yearning, and the first impulse of her delicious freedom was to go back to it. She went.

The five years spent in Paris, and in the capitals and art-centres of the Continent, were the educators of Circe Sutherland. They shaped her culture and crystallized her character. These years were one long pursuit of pleasure; but of pleasure in its lower forms, never. Her study of music under the best masters would have been labor, had it not been, beside, an inspiration and a passion. It is an exacting art, and in its absorption of her time and thoughts, Circe Sutherland escaped many temptations and not a few snares. For wherever she appeared she created the personal sensation which a woman so young, beautiful, gifted, rich, and unwedded, was sure to win.

She was tempting as an apple of the Hesperides to that large class of men in Europe to whom pleasure is a life-pursuit, and gallantry a fine art. To them, "Aunt Jessie" did not seem to be a very dangerous dragon. But more than one lived to find himself the slave of an enchantress whose infantile mouth and child-voice made him sure in the beginning that he was to be her master. A master was something which in this life Circe Sutherland was never to find. She might surrender to a degree; how often that face seemed to say that she did

so wholly ; but far down in her being, unmoved, was the will which from first to last held her in all ultimates wholly her own. It was the most potent force in her, this passion for freedom, this will that would not brook restraint, that defied coercion. This dominating trait, veiled as it was from sight by the most feminine softness, was the central spring of her thought and action. It forced her beyond the pale of the mother church, whose primal law is obedience. It forced her mentally and spiritually out to drift upon the shoreless seas of speculative philosophy and free thought, whose victims, once out, so rarely ever again cast anchor.

She knew no God but nature — not nature in the divinity of her Edenic forms of beauty, but nature in the human ; in its instincts, its impulses, its yearnings, its pleasures. Her God was her own desires. Fortunately for her these were not erratic nor prone to wild excesses. Had they been, she must have landed in Tophet long before. Passion was pain, therefore her intention was never to suffer from passion if she could help it. It had been perfectly easy for her to help it so far. She was too æsthetic, too subtly sensuous, to be easily satisfied with anything. She had met many of the highest rank, of the finest mental endowments and attainments ; she had accepted homage from many such. She had fancied herself in love with not a few. But soon or late they had all wearied or offended her mentally in some way, often in an undefinable one, and she came back to her own wilful and pleasure-loving soul, more than ever the mistress of herself and of men.

Had she no heart ? Oh, yes. But she had other

forces in her far stronger. She loved pleasure and power more than she could ever love a lover. Men are the natural prey of such women, as women are the legitimate prey of such a man. Yet with a difference. Circe Sutherland was too kindly in impulse to deliberately work out another's woe, nevertheless this was more than likely to be the result when the more potent forces of her nature had play. Her very love of luxury and ease made her prefer to see happy, satisfied people about her. She was very amiable and serene in disposition when she was not crossed, and there were few indeed to cross her. Unlike most women of her type, she was fond of women. She had never been reconciled at heart to being a woman herself, and it was a feeling of half pity that made her kind to other women. In choosing, she would have chosen to injure a man rather than a woman, but she had never yet paused, in pursuit of an end, at the thought of injuring anybody. It was her friendship for a woman that brought her first to New York. The attraction which she found herself to be in that friend's parlors was the cause of her establishing one of her own homes in the metropolis. The natural empire of such a woman is in Europe. But Circe Sutherland crossed the ocean at the time when the seed scattered by philosophers of the Eastern Continent in the fallow Western soil had already sprung up and ripened into crude fruit. Of these the Affinity Club was one. It needed a central figure, a centripetal force to draw together and to blend its dissonant forces. Circe Sutherland was this divinity, this potent magnet. She soon drew to herself a coterie larger and more concentrated than had ever

surrounded her in a European capital, for the reason that there her sovereignty was divided. Not an American by race or culture, she found herself a more unique and engrossing figure in the new metropolis than she could ever be amid the cultivated ranks of the Old World. She found here what she missed and sighed for in vain there — absolute reverence for womanhood for its own sake.

“I prefer the European women of rank to the American women as a rule,” she said, “but no man on earth can compare with the American gentlemen. The European is gallant, chivalric sometimes; the American is chivalric often, reverent always.”

The homage that was hers held her in a land which she often sighed over as “very crude.”

“This rush and din, this graceless hurry, is enough to kill one,” she would cry. “Oh for an hour at the conservatoire, for one evening in Venice, for one day at the Louvre, for a morning at Versailles, with the fountains playing! If I could have Europe, and with it all that is mine here, then life would be perfect. That is impossible, and I must take my choice. Shall it be the perfection of music, of ideal forms, of dead art; or life, love, power? There I live, here I reign. Here I have a kingdom, small, maybe, but it is *mine*. I stay.”

She could endure crudeness, rudeness even, in art and in many of the manifestations of society, while the plastic material that waited her own artistic and transmuting touch was the fresh, rich, unwrought mine of human character surrounding her.

By the merest accident the fateful hinges of life ever

seem to turn. Cyril King met Circe Sutherland for the first time at the villa of her friend. Anywhere and under any conditions these two persons would have impressed each other. In contrasting beauty one dazzled the other. Each nature held elements of fascination for the other. The lack of one was the lack of both — the lack of conscience. Acute in every sensuous and mental direction, in moral sensibility alone both were slow and lethargic. No matter what he did, here was one whose matchless eyes would never question or judge him. Here was one who, basking in the splendor of his gifts, would never turn and stab him with the question, "Is it right?" "Is it wrong." And oh, what would it not be to him, to any man living, the thrilling welcome of that voice, the soft approval of that face, the seductive worship of that lifted glance and smile!

A man of much stronger moral nature than Cyril King could not have failed to receive such impressions from a manner such as Circe Sutherland's. It never occurred to Cyril to silence or to repress them, as they sprung up in his thoughts. The cup of the gods was lifted to his lips at last. Love, flattery, homage, each after its kind had been his; never before recognition, inspiration, worship like this. Circe Sutherland smiled upon all men till she tired of them; but rarely in her life had she smiled upon any man as she smiled upon Cyril King. She was most fascinating because she herself was fascinated, and implied it to the full in voice, in glance, in manner, without one committed word. She was perfectly aware that no homage is so delicate, so subtle, so potent, as this which suggests everything without the limitation of a word. She knew nothing

of his personal life or associations when she met him first. When she learned them from the lips of her friend on the great piazza overlooking the Sound, her interest in him did not lessen, it deepened.

"Why should such a man be so enslaved and bound, forsooth! Shall he starve himself and do *her* no good? Never," said the queen of the Affinity Club, she whom her worshippers called "the queen of the good, the beautiful, and the true."

The regenerated capital of the nation in which we rejoice to-day is not the one to which Cyril and Agnes came. They reached Washington before the transforming hand of a great organizer had touched and transfigured it. The dawning Paris that it is to-day, no lover of it ever dreamed that it could be then. For he whose genius created and shaped it for its far-off and resplendent future, Peter L'Enfant, already slept in his forgotten grave. The sunny "circles" now set like emeralds in its broad transverse avenues, brave with flowers and fountains and happy children, then were mimic Saharas, real indeed in the searing and sifting qualities of their ever-flying sands. No seats set under Norway pines, and in the grateful shadow of honeyed magnolias, then invited the wayfarer in Lafayette Square. The grim image of Jefferson in front of the White House had not then retired to the side grounds, to give place to the central fountain which now pervades the fervid air with its saving coolness. The western side of the Treasury was not begun, the white splendors of the new Navy and War Departments were not dreamed of, and the unwrought marbles of

the great Capitol wings still lay untoached in their native quarries.

The five-minute car with its one sacrificial horse had not then saddened with ceaseless tug the silence of the streets. The same little struggling omnibus which carried John Randolph of Roanoke to and fro from Georgetown to the Capitol still made its tedious and tardy trips, — at special hours crammed to the driver's seat with Congressmen. The stately metropolitan blocks now stretching out in every direction then had never appeared outside of the brain of Peter L'Enfant, when he planned his new Paris of the future. Instead, square stately mansions rose at intervals from Capitol Hill to Georgetown Heights ; but their next neighbors were very sure to be a hovel or a shop, excepting the historic houses which with their gardens made an unbroken cordon around Lafayette Square.

In the main it was a straggling city of magnificently broad streets and avenues, and quaint, two-story, red brick houses with high, steep, one-sided steps, staring front-doored areas, and peaked dormer windows. Pennsylvania Avenue, majestic in breadth and length, stretching past its "Treasury" crowned Acropolis to its Capitolian Hill, was lined with these two and three story dormer-roofed houses devoted to combined homes and shops. They were like the houses built in the colonial days of New York, which still do service in the Jew quarter of the Bowery, and not at all like the stately buildings the world had a right to expect would line the grand avenue of the capital of a great nation. To Agnes they looked smaller and lower than the compactly builded blocks of provincial Ulm.

The avenue was never crowded, not even when the government departments poured out their tides of workers. There was always room and to spare on it for old men, women, and little children ; also for the fine lady, the rushing representative, the stately senator, the weary slave. Room and to spare on the great thoroughfare for all its vehicles ; for the little rocking omnibus, the showy equipages of the government functionaries and foreign ambassadors, for the one-mule market cart from Maryland, and the great primeval cotton-topped wagon from Virginia with its three horses, a slave astride the leader. There was room and to spare on the grand avenue of the capital of the United States for all these vehicles. They never ran into each other.

CHAPTER XVI.

AGNES AT THE CAPITAL: THE NEW MEMBER.

IN those days the capital of the United States was at once both a quaint and a crude city. Its old houses suggested a past more ancient than themselves; for not only were the bricks from which many of them were builded brought across the Atlantic, but without and within they repeated the architecture of old England's homes. Nevertheless the new government buildings, looming up in many directions, while their staring outlines pointed to Greece and Rome as the source of their origin, seemed also to supplicate that remote future which alone could crown them with completeness and touch their stark splendors with the mellowness of time. It was a weariness to look upon them now. Their white marble gleaming through miles of scaffolding, their domes and capitals wound in ropes like innumerable spider-webs, they oppressed you at once with a sense of vastness and of hopeless incompleteness. But the capital of her country gave far more to Agnes than the traditions or prophecies of its buildings, either old or new. It gave perpetually new revelations to her observant and reverent eyes. Till she reached its latitude she had never seen such sun-risings and sun-settings, such cloud scenery, such prismatic refractions of polarized light, such a depth of purple distance in the

atmosphere, which in one palpitating and luminous sea floated over the emerald city and touched with nebulous gold the far Maryland and Virginia hills. She had never dreamed of a city with such vistas; of such broad streets with wide gates in the distance, opening on the great river with its passing sails, upon glimpses of meadows and peaceful farms, upon the flush and frontage of the encircling hills. She had never dreamed that a metropolis could lead to such an inviolable sanctuary of nature as the Rock Creek road. Here the starry anemone, the trailing arbutus, the flower innocent—the tri-colored violet, came earliest; here the wild honeysuckle and laurel covered the rocks with bloom and fragrance; here the choristers of nature sang their *Te Deums* undisturbed. The oak, the elm, the maple, the fringing willow here bent low above the creek, and there arose in lofty walls of verdure high above it. On its uplands wilted the sweet grass of the early mowing, and at rare intervals a primitive house lifted its lowly whitewashed walls amid blooming orchards and fields of delicious clover. Far below, mile after mile wound the creek beloved of nature and of all nature-loving souls. Dear Rock Creek! The little child loves the laughter of thy rippling waters; the weary statesman leaves behind him the din of the capital to find rest in the peaceful murmur of thy primeval stream; and the woman with whom human life has broken faith, within sound of thy voice draws nearer to nature's heart, till she feels on the hurt of her own the saving touch of the mighty mother! So much, and more, nature at the capital gave Agnes; not at once, but before she left it. It was well that even here she

did not go astray from her lifelong comforter, for the human life that confronted her startled, confused, and at last aroused her. It was a type of human life of which previously she had had no comprehension. She did not comprehend it now. A daughter of the republic, she had grown up to believe herself favored of God because of that daughterhood. No country could be so free, so enlightened, so great, as this land of her birth. What meant this slave on the street—what these gangs of slaves chained together on their way to the human market? What meant the slave-pen in Alexandria, into which she was shown one day? What meant these men, armed and defiant, who stalked in the halls of the Capitol, showing their weapons and shouting their threats? What meant these stormy, wild, and passionate debates in Congress, which in spite of herself drew her out of her own meagre life into the atmosphere of their own tremendous portents? Never till now had her being sprung to its highest level. She was not by nature a partisan. She had a constitutional inaptitude to extremes. The warm Southern temperament with which for the first time she now came in personal contact, was full of attraction to her. In the quick impulse, the suave manner, the generosity, the grace of the Southron she found a charm which, when she was conscious of it, she knew she had often missed in her earlier associates. She felt this charm through all her heart, yet it was powerless to dim her moral perceptions, to dull the clear impression of early precepts, or to deaden the clear currents of her inherited blood. At last John Darcy had resurrection in his child. She could not remember her father's speech.

nevertheless, when almost a baby she sat on the lap of her young mother, and the sound that smote her infant ears was the voice of that father lifted in thrilling eloquence in behalf of human rights and the inviolable brotherhood of man. The same intense love for human nature, the same eloquence, unvoiced, now thrilled in the pulses of his child. Social companionship, equality of race, made no conflict in her mind with the thought: Whatever God has given my brother, be it much or little, he has by that birth gift the indestructible right to his selfhood. What God has given, let not man essay to take away. "How dare one human being, however superior, attempt to own another?" This question she asked in sorrow day by day while for the first time she found herself in contact with, and compelled to avail herself of the services of an enslaved race.

Why should not little Dan be taught, as well as little Cyril? she would ask, gazing into the bright eyes of her nurse's little boy. Why should Cæsar or Chloe be arrested, more than I, if their daily toil holds them from their homeward way till one moment past nine o'clock in the evening? "Because they are slaves; it is, but it should not be," was the only reply which she could wring from the sense of justice within.

Thus, with a woman's intuitive reasoning, she struck from the universal inward to the individual. But in measuring the rights of one as a human being, she measured the rights of all humanity and penetrated at once to the very roots of despotism and of justice. Touching the inner issue, it vibrated to the remotest spring of universal life.

We who study the national legislation of to-day — who listen to eager and acrid debates in Congress concerning manufacturing and railroad monopolies, concerning the material industries and resources of our land, concerning “jobs” and “claims,” whose highest end is money and power to the individual — realize but faintly the moral insurrection which, near a generation ago, filled the nation with agitation, and the halls of Congress with conflicts of passionate debate. We live in more prosperous days. We have fallen upon an era of lower issues. The storm of fire and blood and unavailing tears died in peace at last, when the flowers of May were scattered upon the graves of the Blue and the Gray alike, at Arlington. But we who were children then can never realize what it was to those who received upon heart and conscience the unabated force of its first fury. In that dark day of our history, Cyril and Agnes King came to Washington. There was but one power in the land: that was the power of Slavery. From the President in the executive chair, to the smallest page in the Capitol, all loved or condoned it. Every office in the gift of the government was a bribe to silence in behalf of this monstrous wrong. Abject subserviency to its decrees was the test, not only of accepted patriotism, but of personal popularity and of social success. The smiles of women, the light of drawing-rooms, the pleasures of the table, the emoluments of office, the prizes of power, were not for the hated abolitionists. The administration of law, the richest possibilities of society, belonged alike to the potentates of oppression. To the newcomer on one side was power, wealth, ease, the favor of

women, the recognition of the great ; on the other, contumely, scorn, sneers, and utter ban. Do you marvel that so few had moral nerve to choose the latter? No one could, save he or she in whom conscience was the omnipotent force, crushing instinct and desire till they had no life left to cry. The right or wrong of anything was what Cyril King felt last. The right or wrong of any thought or act was what Agnes King felt the first and the most keenly. Hither she had come to take on the full yoke of her nature. No one endowed by God with a preponderance of moral perception united to extreme sensibility can ever hope for happiness in this life in the presence of wrong-doing or of human pain. These are they who with unutterable yearning attempt to make the crooked straight. Never are they "the idle singers of an empty day." They are the unconscious Christs of the human race, who make the sins and sorrows of all humanity their own. Often they pray that the cup of mortal burden may pass by them, but it never does.

In this new, quickening atmosphere Agnes realized how narrow a life she had lived — not in womanly cares or duties, but in concentration of thought and feeling. Had not all her reflection, aspiration, sorrow, and love introverted upon herself and upon what belonged to her? Had she not lived as unconsciously and as indifferently to the wrongs and pangs of her fellow creatures, as if she herself made the whole of the race instead of one tiny atom in the vast human family?

The debates in Congress became a potent element in the new process of education upon which she entered. They moved her powerfully because they touched and

quickened the most powerful faculties of her moral nature — her love of truth, her passion for justice, her keen perception of its most imponderable demands, her love of mercy, her tenderness for all suffering things. Shrinking in temperament, she still possessed every quality of a moral heroine. Had she been a man in that legislative hall, no moral or mental quality need to have been added to have caused her to stand in the vanguard, battling for truth and right against might; one of the precious few against the potent many.

From its gallery she gazed down upon the Senate of the United States. From its councils had forever passed the three historic men who, combined, had made the political will of the last generation, and whose words, for bale more than for blessing, were to mould the destiny of the generation to come. A new triumvirate had arisen. Already three Olympian men stood forth prophets and martyrs of the future — Chase, colossal, cold, and grand; Seward, subtle, wise, cool, serene optimist; Sumner, cast in the mould of the Vatican Apollo, with shape and gesture proudly eminent, the dauntless youth with the single sling, whose heroic hand was soon to strike that death-blow to oppression, which in its terrible rebound further on would also prove to be his own. Calhoun was dead. Clay, with his illuminated face, his scimitar-flashing wit, his imperial voice with the beguiling music in its tones murmuring of "compromise," had succumbed to the final fiat, laid down his crown for another, and passed out forever. Webster, the mighty lion of the state, baffled at last after seventy years of battle, worn out with the

echo of his own futile roar, had gone broken-hearted into his own retreat to die. In his place stood the young Puritan, pure, implacable, aggressive, he who but a few years before had cried to Webster out from among the people, as a defender of the Constitution, to work the overthrow of slavery. "Assume," he said, "a more illustrious name. The aged shall bear witness to you; the young shall kindle with rapture as they repeat the name of Webster; the large company of the ransomed shall teach their children, and their children's children to the latest generation to call you blessed; and you shall have yet another title, never to be forgotten on earth or in heaven, Defender of Humanity!"

Prescient words! Little did he who uttered them dream that it was his own god-like head that would bear down to posterity the *immortelle* of such a name.

In those days mental individuality marked the Senate of the United States. There was Benton, with his eagle front and imperious speech; Soulé of Louisiana, with his dark beauty and dramatic eloquence; Hale of New Hampshire, radiant with laughter and wit, the sparkling frontlets of his granite nature; Foote of Mississippi, with his passionate and nervous energy; Jefferson Davis, mixing the military and the ministerial in his unconciliatory tirades; Butler of South Carolina, with mocking eyes and snow-white hair, the Don Quixote of Charles Sumner's fatal Kansas speech; and Cass and Fillmore, gentle gentlemen, but most unctuous of compromisers: all were there, and every day more and more, the fate of the nation trembled in the balance, and drew nearer to its day of doom.

"Sir, to men on earth it belongs only to deserve success ; not to secure it."

These words from the lips of the Senator from Massachusetts rang through the brain of Agnes as she took her seat in the gallery of the House of Representatives. Cyril was to speak that day. In uttering himself would he speak for her also? In her love of truth and justice would he represent her, his wife, who must be silent?

She asked this question with bated breath as she leaned over the gallery to listen, while "the honorable member," Cyril King, arose to his feet. His clear, melodious voice rose and floated through the noble old hall. No matter what words it uttered, — the music of its vibrations would cause all men and women to pause and to listen.

"Not for compromise ! Oh, not for compromise !" cried the soul of Agnes in mute protest, as the first sentence fell upon her ears.

"I do not hear aright ; I know that I cannot !" she said to herself as she pushed her bonnet-strings back and leaned farther over the gallery. She heard all too clearly. The excited color slowly faded from her face as she drew back and sat motionless as a marble image to the end of his speech.

"What do I want?" she asked herself. "Revolt, anarchy, revolution? No, a thousand times, no. I want truth because it is truth ; honor because it is honor ; justice because it is justice. Woe to the nation that would build itself upon a grievous wrong. For this will its blood flow." Could the commingled thought, emotion, and prescience which met in this woman's brain

have taken on utterance, men, the crude men of affairs in the great arena below, would have listened breathless, as men listened in ages ago to the words of the inspired sibyl who foresaw their doom and prophesied their fate. Dumb, the eloquence of that awakened and exalted spirit was never to find translation in speech. All that any one could see who glanced at her was a slight woman, worn in features, and pale, almost to pallor, sitting perfectly motionless on a seat in the gallery, apparently gazing upon her husband, who was making an eloquent, witty, and popular speech.

She knew that she saw him, yet she seemed to see something more. Beyond him the future opened like a gate. From beyond, and still beyond, came armies of marching men. The nation was in arms. Her battle-fields were red with blood, sown thick with the bodies of her slaughtered sons. Her homes were desolate. Her loves were bleeding at myriad pores. Her flag was torn, dishonored, trampled in the dust. Brother was slaying brother. By such death-throes was Freedom to be born. By such baptism of blood and flame was the nation to be regenerated and perpetuated — and because of such words as these.

So much her soul forecast, yet her face made no betrayal. She had a look on it that some might have called absent, and some uninterested for the reason that it was beyond their ken to interpret it at all.

“Stupid!” Circe Sutherland chose to declare it, from her front seat further along, from whence she could command the entire situation below and above. “Think of such a man, with such an image as that staring at

him. You can afford to be sorry for him," she whispered to her lady companion.

Agnes heard the whisper. She turned instantly and was conscious in the same instant that she was the subject of the whisper, also who it was that whispered.

Again she turned and looked upon her husband. She knew now, to whom, and for whom he spoke. Cyril saw both women in the front seat of the gallery with almost preternatural distinctness. His words were not the spontaneous outburst of the moment. They had been pre-considered, weighed in the finest balance, their utmost cost counted. He knew in advance how they would cut Agnes to the heart, and how she would look when she listened to them. It would not be an easy thing to do, to utter them in her presence: that look which he knew meant sorrow, disappointment, heart-pain, moral supremacy, was not an easy one for him to encounter and never would be; but he could confront it easier than he could its antipodes weighed against it in the opposite balance. It was the test speech of his opening congressional career. It was to decide for him much more than the mere approbation of his wife — his political and social status, his place in the favor of Circe Sutherland. The local great man finds in his home popularity no guarantee of his universal acceptance and high position in Congress. His pre-won reputation only challenges criticism, and commands exacting expectation from colleagues whose practical faculties have long been strengthened and sharpened by forensic training and the discipline of parliamentary rules and debate. Much was expected and not a little demanded of the talented, rising young

man who had just taken his seat in the House. Had he the heart, the courage, to devote his powers to the despised minority? Had he mental insight to see that "in the nature of things minorities are always more intellectual than multitudes? that intellect is ever at work sapping numerical force?" Had he the spiritual prescience to foresee the final triumph of that minority through the inevitable cumulative force of the right? No one who knew his temperament dared hope these of him. It was public ban, the ignominious brand of "the abolitionist," social ostracism, the frown of the woman who enthralled him, set against the handshake of Horace Greeley and Joshua Giddings, the cool approbation of Adams, the Jove-like glance of Sumner, whom he disliked and wished to defy; the tender satisfaction of Agnes, which he had learned to live without. No phase of the great principles at issue stirred him with enthusiasm. He instinctively detested a "nigger;" believed that he was made to be a slave to just such men as himself. The eternal demands of justice he did not concern himself about in the slightest, not with any application to the enslaved race. "Not for all the niggers ever made," was he going to join the despised and frantic fanatics who were hopelessly trying to fight their battles; or to close against himself the luxurious abodes of the capital, whose illuminated doors opened to him at once, and whose hospitable and gracious inmates had hastened to call him "one of our own;" or to shut himself into the outer darkness where the light of one smile would reach him never more! Was Agnes mad, in her bigotry and fanaticism, that she could ask such sacrifice?

The debate was long. The tide of Southern members who crowded about Cyril King to congratulate and to claim him as their own, had receded; another member was sawing the air with his arms and making futile efforts with a feeble voice to penetrate the pervading roar of the turbulent House, which was "making up" for the voluntary silence of a few moments before by turning the great legislative hall into a veritable pandemonium.

Agnes slowly made her way out of the gallery, turning her steps to the dearest resort which the beloved Capitol afforded her, the Congressional Library. Everything in it or about it seemed dear to her: the view from its veranda, the garden city beyond the Capitol grounds, the sinuous river flecked with sails, the girdling hills with their umbrageous belts and crowns; Arlington House, its yellow walls peering from its park on the Virginia uplands; dim, dusty Alexandria, Virginia's mart for slaves — all fed her sight and her thought. But the alcoves within had treasures for her dearer still. She went straight to one of these now. Looking over the books might make her forget, at least it would help her to grow inwardly calm.

She sat slowly turning over the leaves of various books as she took them from the shelf by her side, when she heard the door of the next alcove open and a party enter it. In the same instant she heard Cyril's voice saying: "Make yourselves at home, and any books you choose to select have charged to me. I think the House will adjourn shortly. If so, and I find you here, may I have the honor of escorting you to Willard's?"

"We shall be but too happy," replied the child-voice of Circe Sutherland, and in a moment more the wicket of iron lace-work closed and Cyril returned to his seat in the House.

"Never mind the books! Do tell me about this man, a perfect god! and you say that dreadfully inferior-looking woman in the gallery was his wife! Well, I am obliged to her for getting out of the way, so that I could have so good a chance to see him! but tell me, Circe, how she happens to be his wife?"

These were the words which, in a distinct whisper from the mouth of Circe Sutherland's companion, penetrated Agnes' ear from the adjoining alcove.

"Another one of those unfortunate cases," murmured Circe Sutherland, in whose vocabulary the oft-told tale was already stereotyped. "One of those very unfortunate cases of which we see so many in public life, where the husband has gone on in mental development and left the wife far behind."

"This Mrs. King is a very inoffensive little thing," said Circe, with the intention of being intensely benevolent in her remarks. "There is no harm in her whatever, except the harm she does in being his wife. I've heard she is an abolitionist; but it doesn't matter in the slightest what she is in opinion, I mean mentally. She can't influence him an atom: you see that in his speech of this afternoon. But 'tis a pity that such a man has no one to entertain for him or to do the honors of his home as they should be done. Give me such a man, I'd steer him straight into the White House before another decade. Not that I would consider it any honor to go there myself. But he is the first

American I ever saw whom I thought fit to be the President."

"You are enthusiastic, Circe, but I agree with you."

"Of course I am more so than I would be if he had a different wife. But really superior men are so rare. When you do find one it seems a pity to see a dead weight of a wife hanging about his neck, dragging him down so that it is impossible for him ever to rise."

"She don't look very strong; he may outlive her."

"Oh no, he won't. Such little, chronic, ailing women never die. There should be a more agreeable mode of relief. I don't believe in any law that binds a man and woman together who don't belong to each other. But I've no doubt he will drag out his pilgrimage of penance to the end."

"Is he fond of her?"

"No doubt, in a way. She thinks the sun rises and sets in him. And she is perfectly devoted to their children, so he says. If he speaks of her at all, it is in the most devoted way, though it is hard enough for him to be personally devoted; any one with open eyes can see that. It's not what he says, but what he is, and what she is, that tells the story — a sad one, you see, when you look at him."

"After all, I think it's sadder when you look at her," answered the friend. "Half a glance tells you that he has a thousand resources where she can have one. In losing him, she would lose all. If he were to lose many like her, the world would yet be before him full of other worlds — in the shape of women to conquer."

"Perhaps so," said Circe Sutherland.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHUT IN THE CAPITOL.

AGNES could do naught but sit and hear the cruel words which smote her ears. They would penetrate through the little alcove in which she sat, and she could not leave it without being seen by the speakers.

Presently she heard the click of the adjoining wicket and Cyril's voice again : —

"The House adjourned earlier than I thought it would. Nugent is a droning bore. There were three refuges from him — to call the previous question, to filibuster, or to adjourn. We were tired out and voted the latter. Nice for me. I've come to claim the honor and the pleasure" —

"That awaits you on the East side," laughed Circe. "The carriage waits, my lord! We shall be only too happy, shall we not, Agatha?"

"Yes, indeed," chimed in another soft voice.

Agnes started to her feet. The impulse swept through her to pass out and confront them face to face as they left the alcove. She wanted Circe Sutherland to know that Cyril King's despised wife had heard every word that she had uttered.

Her feet had lost their cunning. She stood as one paralyzed. She could not move. The impulse to confront her rival was less powerful than her fear of

Cyril. What would be the afterwards if she made an unpleasant scene for him in a public place? Perhaps she was just what Circe Sutherland said, poor, inferior in every way. She would confront her. She could not *him*!

She sank back upon her chair, and as she did so the three passed out of the adjoining alcove. The light laugh, the voice cadence, deep and rich, and sweet and low, floated back to her as they went. She took down another book from the shelves and mechanically turned over its leaves, but saw nothing on its pages. She was mentally stunned, like one not yet strong enough to react from a heavy blow. The just released members, eager to "read up" for a speech or a report, rushed through the space outside to the desk of the librarian, calling on that gentle repository of forgotten lore to tell them what they wanted. Languid ladies turned over the leaves of the great catalogues in search of the latest novels; the readers clustered about the tables, seeking in silence the wisdom that they wanted. Through the great windows opposite, she could look out across an amphitheatre of space, and up into the empyrean. Through the blue-golden spaces stole the tremulous, ever-hovering purples, like opaline doves' necks' lustre. This purple haze hung above the city as it does above the hills of Rome. In the distance, the yellow walls of Arlington House seemed actually to shimmer through waves of amethystine mist. In the open vista wave on wave of light massed and rolled on with a delicacy of tint, a depth of hue, an immensity of volume, which no words can portray, and no eyes see elsewhere save in the intense refractions of light

on the Alpine glaciers. Agnes' eyes, resting on the great windows, saw all, noted all, and yet only as one would in a dream. She saw also the men and women moving softly to and fro, but saw them as one sees silent images. All the while thought, consciousness, intense and bitter, were busy within her.

"It will be an unequal match," slowly said her soul, "but I will try. I may be worsted at the last, but it shall not be without a struggle for what is mine. I'll not sink, repine, and let my all be taken from before my eyes without protest. If it is unequal, nevertheless it shall be battle." She did not look the least like a fighter of battles, even of the heart, as she sat there alone in the now shadowy alcove. The sea of color without now cast its waves of orange, purple, and gold against the western sky, till the Virginia hills looked like the emerald bastions of some flaming city of enchantment, whose transfusing hues were thrown backward, transfiguring in glory the city of the earth lying far below. They stole through the great windows of the Capitol; they laid their slanting bars of paling gold across the white face looking forth from the alcove. Agnes started and came back, she knew not from whence, to consciousness of the moment. Where was the silent throng that she gazed upon, as she thought, but a moment before? Where the gentle-faced librarian? Where her resolve to suffer? Yes, and to assert — and be strong? She was alone. There was the young moon hanging its crest of light above the broad Potomac. There was Venus, pure and planetary, resting above the western hills — and here was she, alone in the shadowy alcove. She must go to her

children, to soft-eyed little Cyril, to happy, life-giving little Vida. Their father! Her heart gave one mighty throee, as if in an instant it would sink back, still, forever. "Cyril! How can you leave me!" it cried, true and tender no less for doubt and torture. "I must find you, Cyril;" and she essayed to rise and to go forth from the place in which she found herself. When she tried to stand, she began to realize the shock that she had received. It was with extreme difficulty that she bore her weight or took a single step, nor did she know, now, of the unconscious state into which she had passed, or realize aught of her present situation. She reached the ponderous outer door, and lifting her hand to move it on its ponderous hinges, found that it was locked. Then came another shock of consciousness. She was in the Capitol alone! The hour for the closing of the library had long passed. She would have known that before if she could have thought of it. She uttered no cry. The benumbed condition of her nerves made it impossible that she should be wildly frightened. She looked back. Tier on tier above her and around her, arose the clustering volumes which shut in the philosophy and science, the wisdom and folly of the past and of the present. The mighty dead were with her; but the living, her living — save her children, was it not far better that she was where they were not? The twilight gold fused now the dim alcoves, the lofty aisles, the white colonnades without, the soft traceries within.

"I am not afraid," she murmured, "I am tired. Maybe God will let me sleep here and never wake — not in this world — and in the other my children might

come to me. I think God would let them come to their mother there. *They* would not need them here." And with these words exhausted physical nature again gave way, and softly as a child might sink to peaceful sleep upon the velvet turf without, Agnes sank down by the lofty bolted door of the inner Capitol, and with one grateful sigh passed out into the domain of peace which men call unconsciousness.

Far below her stretched the great hall which measures the Capitol from end to end. Without, in the dimness and silence, arose the Egyptian colonnades, the mighty shafts of stone which bear upon their tops the mightier mass of marble, and which seem strong enough to support the world. The gaslights flickered dimly on the walls of the vast Rotunda, on the historic pictures, on the solitary watchman pacing the stone floor in solemn guard. Vast and visionary were the vistas opening on in all directions. The jar and tumult of human life were still. The struggles of the nation had ceased for a night. So also had ceased for a night the struggles of one woman's heart, alone at rest within the Capitol, to her so dear.

Her husband was not thinking of her, not then. His intention when he left the Capitol, was to drive up the avenue with Circe Sutherland and her friend to their hotel, escort them to their parlor, and then return to his own lodgings to dine. How it chagrined him that he was not rich enough to keep a house in Washington! But his intentions were of no account whatever beside the wishes of Circe Sutherland.

"You will dine with us?" she cried. "Oh, do! Help us to forget the barbarism of our dinner. Can't you

legislate for a national school of cooks? I assure you there is no institution that your country needs more. If anything could arouse them to civilization on such a subject, it would be such eloquence as yours. Ah! you won't leave us forlornities to dine alone. How can you!"

"I can't. I didn't know one could dine alone at Willard's."

"'Alone in crowds,' you know. I'd rather dine alone if I cannot dine with the one I want. I want you."

The last sentence, in the thrilling tone which always vibrated along the remotest chord in Cyril's heart decided his stay.

A few moments later, he with his companions were the observed of all the great throng assembled in the dining-hall of Willard's, as they passed to the table always specially reserved for her, followed by the white-gloved servitor who had so often stood behind Cyril's chair in the luxurious dining-room of Circe's home.

Circe Sutherland was an empress of her class, — a class known in all the capitals of the world, and who nowhere attract more attention, win more admiration, and command more influence, than in the capital of the United States. This type of woman in the lower strata may merge into the adventuress, but at the summit of such a life she is both enchantress and queen. Her history perfectly known in her own home, in her bird of passage existence here is but dimly guessed at; all the mystery and romance born of this lack of knowledge but deepens the interest felt in the beautiful unknown whenever she appears.

At present Circe Sutherland is the personal sensation of the season. Fabulous tales are told of her wealth, and the wildest romances are drifting about concerning her personal history. She does not escape the imputation of being "a lobbyist," the most potential member of the "Third House." She is engaged in "pushing" privately immense personal and company claims through Congress. She is the secret ambassadress of a foreign power. She is a beautiful gambler who is now sporting on the spoils she won at Baden Baden. She is the rich widow of an old planter who adored her, and who disinherited his children to lavish his vast fortune upon his youthful bride. She is not a widow at all. She is a divorced woman, and her poor husband is shut up in a lunatic asylum, a raving maniac because of her and of her heartless misdeeds. These are but a few of the tales concerning Circe Sutherland floating upon the surface of society. Her personal friends know that these stories all shoot wide of the mark of fact. Her own "set" know all about her, and that is quite sufficient for this daring but by no means reckless lady. She delights in free opinions, in "advanced ideas," when they suit her, but her fondness for them does not involve a risk of the surface proprieties of society, nor endanger for an instant her status in "high life." She would disdain personal explanations to "the mob," but she is perfectly certain to keep right with her own. She would make her personal potency a lever any day to lift to a majority vote in Congress any claim or measure which a friend might have at heart, and so far join the lobby; but she would never do it for money, nor for anything but

for love or friendship. Only in the same phase could she ever be a politician. It is for persons that she cares, not for principles. She despises republicanism, and is by every antecedent and instinct an aristocrat. She has a passion for freedom, but it is the freedom of the person, the class ; not, through justice, of the family of man. No, if she believes through all her blood more in one thing than another, it is in masters and slaves ; in her opinion, at least half of the human race was made for the other. She smiles when she hears that she is at the capital for any political design. She knows that she is here because Cyril King is here, and for no other cause whatsoever. Here, because it pleases her to be where she can see him, hear him, influence him, bask in the felicity of her power over him. No matter why she is here, her mere presence attracts attention and creates sensation. She is young, beautiful, and has no masculine escort. Yet she brings her own servants, drives her own horses, and her equipage on the avenue vies with those of the foreign ambassadors. If she does not set up her own private establishment it is because she does not want the trouble, and because the caravansary and excitements of the great hotel for a few passing weeks pleases her better. Her appearance in the dining-hall, accompanied by her aunt and followed by her liveried lacquey, is always a signal for all eyes to turn and behold the fair sight. She seems ever oblivious to the universal concentrated gaze, and yet she is serenely conscious of 't through every fibre.

There is more than the ordinary stir and hum this evening, as Cyril and Circe enter together. "The

new member from ——." "Did you hear his speech this afternoon?" "The abolitionists have not got him after all." "What a couple!" "Is he married?" "Where's his wife?" These are but a few of the exclamations which follow their entrance. They sit long at the table, and at dessert the congratulations begun at the Capitol a few hours before, are continued. Southern member after Southern member comes up to Cyril, offers him his hand with hearty grasp, strikes him on his shoulder, perhaps, and tells him, "You are the right kind of Northern man! Just the kind *we* want." "Good for you! The best speech made this session." "Go on! Just such men as you are will save the country." After dinner the interest shifts to the parlors. "Honorable" gentlemen lead up their "ladies" to introduce them to the eloquent young ally of Southern rights. Group after group gathers, till at last Cyril and Circe stand the central objects of admiration and worship to a gay and brilliant throng. It is one of those spontaneous levees which a popular man or woman can attract, in the public parlor of a Washington hotel, any evening in the gay season. The homage of the throng is fairly divided by the masculine and feminine worshippers. Nevertheless, Cyril, eager to bring fresh tribute to the charmer, asks her to play. In a few moments the wonderful voice floats down the long suite of rooms, accompanying the piano; and as both break into an inspiring waltz a little later, couple after couple swing out into the long area, and go floating down space in an improvised dance. The exhilaration is contagious. At last, looking at his watch, Cyril discovers that it is past eleven. He has not realized that he has been here an hour.

It was midnight when he drew near his lodgings cramped before, they seemed beggarly now. Why was he not born to better fortune, that he might live more in accordance with his tastes? His sensation was by no means an unusual one to a Congressional mind, as it draws near to its Capitolian lodgings. Average domestic life nowhere takes on such a pinched and shabby aspect as at the capital of this nation. Families accustomed to free space in their country homes, come hither to find themselves cramped into dingy little rooms and shabby parlors, decorated with the cast-off curtains, carpets, and chairs of defunct administrations, the débris of the Departments, which make the legitimate spoil of boarding and lodging house keepers in Washington. These decorations, doing service through many seasons, serving many administrations, become the legitimate demesne of ancient vermin, which no human power can dislodge, they having climate as well as antiquity on their side. No less they serve the purpose of furniture to the modern Congressman and his unfortunate wife, whose dreams of splendor break into reality upon their shabby and shaky cushions, and disperse forever amid the conglomerate yet conflicting smells which penetrate every nook and cranny of the average Washington boarding-house.

The rooms of Lotusmere were by no means splendid, but they were spacious, airy, and simply elegant. Cyril need not have felt ashamed to have his most fastidious friend enter them; but these, inhabited at thrice the expense, he wanted no one to see. Circe Sutherland had again spoken of calling on Agnes.

"It is my place to do so, you know," she said with

her sweetest smile. "Etiquette demands that the stranger shall call first upon the member's wife. I shall be but too happy to call and make the acquaintance of Mrs. King."

"Not if I can help it," said Cyril to himself, as he let himself into his lodging-house by a pass-key, and was confronted at the door by much more than the smell of day before yesterday's soup. "Not if I can help it, till we keep house, and when can that be here, unless I make more money than my Congressional pay? A man hasn't any business in Congress unless he has a fortune, or can make one. Public virtue may be very fine in the abstract, — a private purse full is finer in the concrete of one's pocket. Fifty thousand dollars if that claim wins, in *my* pocket. I'll do it. I'll tell Leach to-morrow that I'll do it. I'll have my house, and my carriage as well as the rest of them."

Musing thus he slowly ascended the stairs.

"My committee! of course *my* committee — its bill so soon to be reported — it kept me. Couldn't possibly get home a minute sooner." This rapidly elaborated fiction was all ready for Agnes as he opened the door of the room in which he expected to find her. Instead, he saw only Linda there alone, sitting by little Cyril's bed, with Vida asleep upon her lap.

"Where is Agnes?" asked Cyril with quick alarm.

"I'm sure I don't know," was the answer. "She went up to the Capitol at one o'clock, to hear you make your speech. I would have liked to hear it, but as only one could go, of course it must be your wife."

"Of course," said Cyril mechanically, "but where *is* she, in Heaven's name! I haven't seen her since I saw her in the gallery, and it is midnight now."

"Well, if you haven't seen her, I'm sure I have **not**. The children cried themselves to sleep for her, though, which was unusual. Usually they are quite as contented with me."

Cyril made no reply, but turned and went out. Agnes must be found, and that before morning. Was she lost? That was impossible. Had she harmed herself? That could not be. She had not the temperament to push her to the passionate extreme of self-destruction. Whatever burden was laid upon her she was more likely to bear it than to run from it. Even Cyril knew this. "But if evil *has* befallen her!" he thought with a pang, followed instantly with a throb that held at least one pulse of exultation — "if it *has* befallen her and could not be helped, I see the way straight to fortune and joy. But nothing has befallen her, and I am glad," he murmured in the same breath. "She is somewhere about the Capitol, I know, dazed, unconscious no doubt — haven't I seen her so before? — but I'll find her, I am sure of it, though it will take about the rest of the night. An abolitionist! — an abolitionist! What but perversity makes her *that*! My speech too powerful a pill, no doubt. Well, she must get used to it or stay at home," he said, hardening under a sense of personal discomfort. He was tired by this time, and here he had to start out on foot, he knew not whither, to find his wife. There were no street cars then. He did not want to go for a carriage at that hour of the night. There was but one thing left for him to do — to walk to the Capitol.

Even he, tired, anxious, perturbed, could not help being impressed by its significance as he approached it,

the august Capitol rising white above the masses of dark foliage below, rising from its foundation hill till its dome seemed to fade against the stars.

He knocked against the locked door of the Rotunda.

"Who is there?" asked the guard from within, unfastening the central door while uttering the question. "Oh," he said, lifting his hat as he recognized a member. "Have you forgotten anything, sir?"

"No; but I'm afraid that my wife is here, somewhere. When not well she is sometimes subject to fits of unconsciousness. She came up here to-day and I have just discovered that she has not returned. She is very fond of the Congressional Library; she may be there. For Heaven's sake let us go and see." They stepped across the shadowy Rotunda, the watchman preceeding Cyril with a lantern; they passed the outer corridor and stood before the barred door of the Library. The watchman took down the bar. He then set the key in the great lock of the inside door. As he tried to open it, it seemed to strike an object inside, and opened no further; Cyril thrust his hand in and touched soft garments. "Agnes!" The instinct which leads an animal across flood and field straight to the object of its search had brought him thither. "Agnes!" A rustle, then a soft voice said, "Cyril." "Agnes!" Somewhere amid its dreams the suspended soul heard the beloved voice, and came back in swift reply.

For a moment the day was forgotten. All she thought of was that Cyril, her Cyril had come after her.

"How good of you," she murmured, "to come for me." as he slowly opened the door. "I wonder why I fell down here — oh, I know now," lifting up her hands deprecatingly as if to push the knowledge away.

"And I know too," said Cyril: "because you were a foolish little woman." When he began the sentence he did not think of what came up in his mind now — the scene in the alcove, his own visit to it. Was it possible Agnes was near enough to hear or to see him? But what of it, if she was? All that he said or did was perfectly proper. Of the conversation in the alcove, of course he did not dream.

"Never mind, Aggie," he hastened to say, "I have come after you to take you back to little Cyril and Vida. They wanted you so much, Linda said."

"Did she? I am ready, Cyril;" and he helped her to rise.

"Here," said Cyril to the watchman, dropping a silver coin into his hand. "Remember, there is to be nothing of this in the morning papers."

"I am ready, Cyril," again said Agnes, as she took his arm, and the husband and wife alone went out beneath the morning stars.

"It will be a battle both will fight according to their weapons, and but one can win," said Agnes resolutely to herself as she sat with her children the next day after her midnight sleep at the Capitol. When she awoke in the late morning Cyril had already gone to meet his committee. The Speaker of the House, to show his appreciation of the talented young member, had placed him on a very important committee. It consumed much of his time out of legislative hours, and was an ever ready covert for the unacknowledged ones which it did not consume.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE AMBASSADORS' BALL.

AGNES waked with a dull consciousness that some heavy ill had befallen her. In the first gray light of the wintry morning they confronted her — the words which she heard another woman utter but the day before concerning herself as a woman and wife.

Now, as she sat smoothing Vida's bright locks and looking into the asking eyes of little Cyril, she planned her coming course of action.

"Take a high ground and maintain it, my dear," her friend Mrs. Twilight used to say, when giving her advice in any girlish trouble, and Agnes gave a weary little sigh as she mentally measured the height of the ground to which she must now attain, or be crushed under the triumphal chariot of her enemy.

"I have not her beauty, but I am your mother," she said, kissing each child. "I am his wife. He will not, he cannot forget that long enough to turn to one who would allure him to dishonor. She despises me. She thinks I am incapable of appreciating his career. She shall see. I will use my new strength for him alone. I will practice my music. I will keep up with him in my information of public affairs. I will be silent on the subjects on which we differ, no matter how dear a principle may be to me" — another sigh; "I will

count all outer and public things as naught compared with the devotion of my husband. I will go wherever he goes that I can; then nobody can say that he is ashamed of his wife — that she is too inferior or inefficient to go with him. I will go to the ambassadors ball. Can I bear to meet her there? I can bear anything but the estrangement and loss of my husband."

The ambassadors' ball was to be the culminating social event of the season. The crowded official receptions at which the "mob" overflowed were ended. Even the last Presidential reception before Lent had been celebrated. At that, this same "mob" of "the people" made their ingress and egress through the White House windows. Carpets, curtains, fine raiment, had gone down into a gulf of tatters before them. And now there was to be a ball which this mob could not invade, whose chief end was to be to prove to foreign potentates that exclusive splendor and fine society were possible even to the Federal capital. This ball, to be given by a few of the oldest and richest citizens of Washington to the members of the European embassies in the city, was to be attended only by privately invited guests. The possession of an invitation did not depend in any way upon money, but in every way upon official and social rank. The reception of one of these violet-tinted, silver-chased cards, was deemed by its receiver to be at once a recognition and insignia of personal position. "All Congress" was not to be invited — not by any means. Clodhoppers and plain people were to be left out; people elegant and distinguished were, for once, to be invited without reference to their politics. It must be cosmopolitan, that the

foreign ministers and ambassadors might see the country's best. Hon. Cyril King and Mrs. King were among the invited, but till now, Agnes had not thought of attending.

"I will go to the ambassadors' ball, if you think I can make myself look nice enough," said Agnes to Cyril that evening, lifting half-inquiring half-wistful eyes to his, to see how he would take the proposition.

"For she is so fond of pleasure she cannot be a nun," said Cyril with a laugh.

"Are you making sport of me, Cyril?"

"Of course, not. Only, isn't it a new *rôle* for you to strike for, Aggie, to want to be a lady of society?"

"Why, of course I cannot be, Cyril; I know that. I don't want to be. It would be ever so much pleasanter spending the evening here alone with you, if you could only spare the time, but you can't. And as you are going to the ball, it would be so pleasant to go with you. Don't you want me to go, Cyril?" in a tremulous tone.

"Certainly. I shall be delighted; you go with me so seldom, Aggie. Only, I was thinking you couldn't enjoy yourself there. You don't dance, you know, and a ball is so different from a reception, where the entire business is jamming, talking, and cramming. At a ball, if you can't dance, you must be a wall-flower."

"I shan't mind it. I shall like it to sit looking on to see how well you look dancing. I shall like that."

"I doubt it," he said, turning upon her a quick, searching glance, remembering while he looked that he and Circe Sutherland were already engaged for the first dance.

"You will come and speak to me sometimes between the sets, Cyril? that will keep me from feeling lonesome."

"Oh, of course," said Cyril, more and more puzzled at her evident determination to go. Until now he thought it a mere passing fancy, and had not believed her in earnest.

"At first, I thought I could not go, on account of my dress. It seemed foolish for me to have a dress made expressly for the occasion. It would be so expensive. I doubt if I could, now, the "Star" says so many new dresses are being made and that all the modistes are driven for the ball. I'll tell you what I can do, Cyril. The skirt of my wedding silk is pretty, yet. It is long, and I don't believe it will look old-fashioned. I will go to Willians's and get a pretty muslin overdress trimmed with Valenciennes lace. That will be simple, and quite stylish enough for me. Of course I shall make no attempt to compete with the costumes there. If I can only make myself look well to you, Cyril, that will be quite enough."

"You know that you always look well to me, Aggie," said Cyril, with an honest attempt at gallantry of speech, if only to hide the chagrin that he felt at Agnes' going to the ball at all. Not that he was ashamed of her personally. If not in the fashionable sense elegant or showy, she would be marked as a lady in any company. But he felt in advance that her mere presence would be a restriction upon himself. He had been into society so long and so much alone, had been so long the central object of worship to groups of admiring women, as free to all society appearance, as if he were a single man.

it suddenly struck him that it might be awkward to be this hero with his wife looking on, and certainly he could not come down from his throne because his wife might be looking at him. What had got into Agnes, any way! The purpose to go to the ball had without doubt gotten into her mind, and apparently, by no manner of means was to be extracted.

"Linda, can't you talk Agnes out of the idea of going to the ambassadors' ball?" said Cyril to his cousin, as he paused at the door of the boxy hall bedroom which was now her room in lieu of the sunny chamber at Lotusmere.

"No indeed," answered that imperious young woman, "and I wouldn't if I could. Let her go and see, with her own eyes, the truth and nothing but the truth. I could have told it to her years ago, but she wouldn't have believed it. If nothing will satisfy her but the sight of her own eyes, let her go and use them; she won't go again."

"What in the world are you talking about Linda?"

"You know perfectly well what I am talking about, Cyril King. You are in love with that Creole widow. That you would be in love with somebody, beside your wife, was only a matter of time. I knew that from the beginning. She wouldn't have believed it; she don't believe it now, at heart — thinks if she goes with you that she will avert what danger there is. She is an idiot."

"Why do you speak in such a way of Agnes?" said Cyril, instinctively wishing another to be loyal, in proportion as he felt himself to be disloyal.

"Why do you act so to Agnes?" she asked, as she

brought her eyes to a level gaze with his, filled with an expression of steady triumph. "Agnes and I will soon be in one boat; we can sit in the bottom and drift off together. It will be easier for me, sharing her society."

"You are a lunatic, Linda. I shall *never* forsake Agnes."

"We shall see. Good night." And Linda withdrew into her cell. "She has had her day," she said, as she shut her door. "It will be easier for me to lose mine in her company."

In the morning Linda said to Agnes, "How glad I am that you are going to the ambassadors' ball. What a pity you did not begin such going long ago. No man is safe, not in society, without his wife to look after him. Be sure to give that Creole widow to understand that she is not to monopolize all your husband's attention. Washington is full of stories about her, and the latest is your husband's fascination for her. Of course there is no truth in that; just show the world that there is not, by claiming him in public, yourself. Why, the house is full of the sensation that he and she made together at Willard's last night. That's where he was when you were asleep at the Capitol. He never got back till twelve o'clock."

Agnes had become too inured to years of thrusts like these to do more than writhe under them in silence. She made no reply for an instant, then said: —

"The wife of a public man, especially of a man so personally popular and attractive as Cyril, must make up her mind to share, to some degree, his attentions. It certainly would be impossible for any man or woman

not to admire the beauty of Mrs. Sutherland. It is very remarkable."

"Do *you* admire it?"

"I certainly do."

"Do you admire *her*?"

"I do not, Linda."

"You will admire her less, some day."

"Possibly. It is not in my power to admire any person whose entire life is devoted to self-gratification. Still, Cyril says that she is very amiable. I have no doubt that she is. Linda, will you go with me to Wilhans's and help me select my overdress? The children will be perfectly safe with Chloe, for an hour or two."

No matter how deep down Linda's stabs struck this morning, she was resolved to give no sign.

Circe Sutherland's heartless words in the alcove, in their very smiting, penetrated to the foundations of strength in her nature.

It did not suit Linda to obey Cyril's injunction. She had her own reasons for wishing Agnes to attend the ambassadors' ball, and did all she could to assist her.

"You have been very kind, Linda," said Agnes. "The next time I will help you to go to some pleasant place that you may like."

"Pleasant places are not for the like of me," said Linda, in a tone that would have been moving in Mrs. Gummage.

"Now don't assume that you are 'a poor creetur,' Linda, for you know well that you manage us all."

"Do I!" said Linda, in an incredulous tone. "It is news to me."

"Cyril King! don't be a noodle to-night," she got a

chance to whisper in his ear in her frequent dartings between the two dressing-rooms. "Don't let a sudden compunction tie you to your wife's girdle all night. It would only make the snapping to-morrow the harder. You know perfectly well that you can't stay tied, and that she is a goose and wants you at her elbow forever."

"Linda, do you know for once I think I don't need your advice," said Cyril tartly.

"Oh, you don't ! you'll follow it just the same," and she left him with a low laugh, half irony, half mockery, peculiarly her own.

It was certainly the most resplendent and bewildering scene of its kind that Agnes had ever beheld, — the ladies' dressing-room at the ambassadors' ball. Soft-eyed, low-voiced slaves took each lady's wrappings and with duplicate numbers laid them in the special honey-comb receptacles prepared for them. Others on their knees were buttoning white satin boots, and putting on dainty silken slippers of every imaginable tint. The room was lined with mirrors and dressing-tables, and thronged with women bedecked in every hue. Such sheen of silk, such foam of lace, such splendor of gems, Agnes had never seen before. The ladies in a gentle way were pushing toward the mirrors, to give the finishing look and touches to their attires before entering the ball-room. They looked so dazzling, so beautiful, so overpowering, as they pressed down upon these luminous centres, and Agnes felt so like a little russet wren amid them all, that it did not occur to her that she, as well as they, might look into a mirror to see that the scarlet geranium in her hair was not awry, or her airy muslin rumpled or distraught. She simply sank

into a chair beside a dressing-table and opposite the main door, where she could see Cyril issue from the gentlemen's dressing room.

Near her, giving the finishing touches to her toilette, was the wife of the English minister, stately as a palm, fair, and gentle, in a robe of rose-colored silk flounced with a fortune in black lace. Near her was the Countess —, wife of the minister from France, the dark beauty of an illustrious race, resplendent in azure, white lace, and diamonds. Next her was the young daughter of a senator, perfect in her type of national loveliness; stately, pure, and classic as a white lily in June. With her was a young Englishwoman, supple and soft-eyed as a fawn, whose historic name and marvellous face had made her famous in two continents. These were but a few on whom Agnes' eyes rested with unfeigned and unalloyed delight. She never thought of her own appearance till she caught a glimpse of Cyril's noble head towering above those of other men, as he emerged from the gentlemen's dressing-room across the hall.

"He looks grander than they all," she thought — "and I!" She gave one glance toward the mirror and caught a glimpse of the scarlet blossom nestling safely in her dark hair, — and of the white face beneath. She glanced down upon herself. The wedding silk, that looked ample enough in the little cramped chamber of the lodging-house, certainly seemed scanty and pinched here, beside these court trains and flowing and garlanded waves of lace; but the pure muslin over-dress, though by no means one of Willians's rarest imports, with its breast-knot and loopings of natural flowers, she hoped

softened the defects of the *passée* wedding silk, and made her presentable. She hoped so: she by no means felt sure of it. "I shall never look distinguished enough to be Cyril's wife," the loving heart said with a sigh, as she advanced to meet him. He noted two things in the single glance which he bestowed upon her as he gave her his arm. One, that her dress, plainer than any that he saw, was worn with a grace that gave it the impression of simple elegance; and that the face, worn though it was, bore the stamp of high intelligence, lit by a pair of soft brown eyes whose appealing glance in itself was enough to make the face noticeable and attractive.

The broad staircase which they ascended was covered with crimson cloth, and lined on either side by great classic vases filled with growing and blooming exotics. Through this arcade of blossoming fragrance ascended the dazzling throng to the ball-room above. It was a long and lofty hall, and opened upon the guests like a realm of enchantment. The flags, colors, and emblems of many nations festooned the walls and floated from the ceiling. Hanging baskets laden with blossoms, and censers filled with perfume, floated out into space. Jars of rare plants filled windows and alcoves; garlands of fresh flowers were suspended in mid air from end to end of the hall. Below the empyrean of light in which blazed the crystal chandeliers, hundreds of free canaries disported and sang, perched upon the baskets, nestling in the garlands; their fine notes, piercing sweet, rising above the music of the Marine Band in the gallery. At the opposite end of the hall was the raised dais for the "court" guests of this

republican assembly. Here were the hosts of the evening and their especial guests, the European ambassadors, in their court attire, glittering with the orders and insignia of their rank, accompanied by ladies decked in fortunes of lace and jewels. Here also was the President of the United States with his family, surrounded by his Cabinet and their accompanying ladies, all grouped beneath a canopy of drooping international banners and garlands of flowers. Up to this dais every guest passed, to pay respect to the President and to make obeisance to the foreign ambassadors. Cyril looked sufficiently distinguished to be a high grandee of the occasion. Nevertheless his spirit chafed within him as he passed with the throng who filed up to the dais, across it, and down, to think that after all he was only one of the "mob," invited by a committee of aristocrats solely as a member of the Lower House, and not for any acknowledged personal prestige of his own, either social or intellectual. While Cyril was swallowing the bitterness of this thought, Agnes, dazed slightly by the sudden light and splendor which enveloped her, was wondering how she ever found the courage to resuscitate the faded limpness of her wedding silk with the belief that it could be made fine enough to appear in such a place and in such company.

The greetings past, they proceeded down the hall and took a seat on one of the side sofas which upon the most resplendent occasions wait to receive the inevitable "wall-flowers." Agnes had come to the ball with a full knowledge that she must be one of these, for she could not dance, and as Cyril said, "Not to dance at a ball is to be a wall-flower." She knew also that Cyril

danced with ease and elegance ; that Circe Sutherland was to be there, and thought that she had "nerved herself," as Mrs. Twilight used to say, to behold at least with outward calmness any sight of the sequence of these facts. To be patient, to be pleased, at any cost, was the resolve of Agnes, who knew inwardly that in such a place as this she only came by Cyril's sufferance, not by his desire.

"You know I don't expect or wish to keep you chained to my side," she said with a smile, as he seated himself by her on the sofa. "Do just as you would if I were not here. You dance, you know, and are acquainted with so many people with whom you will wish to speak. It's a great deal for me, Cyril, to look on. I can't tell you how it pleases me. Such light, such splendor, such a picture! It's" —

"It's better than opera," she was about to say, when the memory of the last night at the Academy came into her mind, and she stopped.

"I doubt if the dancing begins for an hour," said Cyril, leaning back as if he intended to remain where he was. "I don't see any one yet that I care to go and speak with. When I do I will introduce to you some one in my place, so you will not feel alone, Aggie," he said kindly.

Perhaps he was not conscious himself that he was already all eyes for one who had not yet appeared. Even as he spoke a change passed over his face, while in the open door of the ball room she appeared who was to be preëminently the belle and queen of the occasion. She was leaning upon the arm of the Senator from Louisiana, whose dark beauty in masculine

form was the type of her own, and whom she resembled nearly enough to be his daughter. Her dress was like the foam of the sea; pale green in shadow, with a floating mist of lace flecked with crystal spray. In her dark hair she wore a star of diamonds, and diamonds and emeralds blazed upon neck and arms. Her appearance made a sensation even in that assembly of exceptionally beautiful women. No one of them all was so preëminently beautiful, so distinguished, as she.

Agnes felt the blood ebb out of her face, and her heart seem to grow still, while she watched Circe Sutherland move on as if she were floating in a cloud of spray toward the dais. "What grace!" she said silently, — just, in spite of her pain. "Sitting here I could rejoice in her beauty," she went on to say to herself, "if it would not take *him* from me. If both together we could behold and admire it, as we do a Psyche in marble, then I should be happy in it: but alas! she is not Psyche, — she is Circe."

"May I introduce you to my wife?" said Cyril King to a colleague in the crowd, a minute or two later. "She don't dance, and she don't know many people here, and I want her to become acquainted."

"Certainly, with pleasure," said Mr. Hugo, good-natured, sharp, and commonplace. "With the greatest pleasure. Where is she?"

In another instant Agnes was conscious of being introduced to a dapper little gentleman who she was sure in the same breath could not interest her in the slightest. Nevertheless she would do her best. She assumed an attitude of attention, and made an effort to bring an

expression of interest into her face, while she replied to the questions of the usual catechism put to every new-comer into Washington life.

"How are you pleased with Washington, Mrs. King?"

"Oh, very much, sir."

"Of course you have learned it is the fashion to abuse Washington; but if you observe, you will see that the very persons who abuse it the most are the ones who are the most anxious to get back to it."

"I think myself that it lacks in home comfort," said Agnes. "Nobody seems to be willing to regard it as a home, but only as a stopping-place. When it becomes a city of homes, as it must, some day, it seems to me that it will be one of the most beautiful cities on earth. It has such streets, such surroundings, such" — sky scenery, Agnes was about to say, when the thought struck her that her companion wall-flower would think her ridiculous.

He did not seem to notice the hiatus. "I am glad to hear you talk so sensibly," he said. "Few new-comers do the same. What is simply a difference from their home surroundings they call discomforts. Where is there another city so full of comforts and servants as the capital? Now our servants" —

"Are a very unfortunate and neglected class, it seems to me, sir," said Agnes, mildly but certainly.

"Oh, now don't talk like an abolitionist! You're *not* an abolitionist, I am sure. You don't look it. And your husband's speech! It isn't possible. No, no!"

Agnes was *distracted* at once; she knew that she had been malapropos. She must try to represent her hus-

band at least by silence, in a place like this. Society was no place in which to give vent to opinions — not as it existed here.

“ You will pardon me I know, Mr. Hugo, when you recollect that till I came to Washington I never saw a slave, and was educated to believe slavery the sum of all villainies.”

“ Dear me ! where were you educated ? How very unfortunate, at this crisis in our country, to feel so — and so differently from your husband. But you will get over it — pitying servants I mean — when you have lived here long enough to learn that that is all they were made for. You really must, for your husband’s sake.” At the same time thinking, “ Where *is* her husband ? What did he go off and leave me with his little abolitionist of a wife for ? Ah, I understand ! Well, I admire his taste this time, at any rate ; though madame is not over-pleased, if I may judge by her looks ; ” and his eyes followed the elegant figures of Cyril King and Circe Sutherland waltzing down the hall in the set just formed.

“ May I introduce to you a gentleman after your own heart, madame ? ” inquired Mr. Hugo, too well-bred to make comment on what might be an unpleasant theme. “ The senator from Massachusetts I know you will admire, as I do myself, personally, although I abhor his principles. Yet I honor him ; any Southern man would honor him for his bravery.”

In another instant the senator from Massachusetts paused to greet his acquaintance, and in another was presented to the unpretending little woman **who** now stood by the sofa.

The name did not strike him pleasantly, she was sure of that, for as he caught it, she saw a shade pass over his expressive features. He merely for an instant connected it with the speech so recently made in the House, by the popular young member of that name, and which he had that very day read in the "Congressional Globe." It was gone in an instant, the shadow, only to be followed by a smile, swift, radiant, enkindling as a god's. Agnes thought that she had never seen such a smile, and she never had. Its ineffable sweetness, breaking in sudden transfiguration of childlike tenderness over the grave and noble features, made the face one of the most remarkable of its generation. We shall never look upon its like again.

Exquisitely sensitive to pure femininity as the highest masculine nature ever is, the deep appeal in the brown eyes lifted to his, with the purity and nobility of the brow above them, arrested his attention at once, and in a moment more held not only his admiration but his sympathy; while all that was childlike and spontaneous in her came into her face and voice and words in response.

"I did not expect ever to have the opportunity of thanking you for the words you uttered on Monday in the Senate," she said. "They went to my heart. Oh, if there were but more to think and feel and speak as you do, how different it would be with our dear land!"

The senator was evidently surprised. "Are you Mrs. King of——?" he asked, as if he thought himself mistaken.

"Yes, sir," answered Agnes, with a shade of confusion passing through face and voice. She had spoken

from the depths of her nature. Connecting it for the first time with his public speech, in an instant she felt that she must seem disloyal to her own husband.

"Let me tell you why your brave words go so to my heart," she went on with naïve tones. "I was taught in childhood to believe in you. My father brought home your picture from Boston when you taught in the law school. After he died it was given to me, and I grew up to believe in you and to admire you more than any other public man. You will know why when I tell you that my father was one of the early abolitionists. He was one with Gerrit Smith and Alvan Stewart, with Garrison and Green and Channing and Johnson. He died when I was a little child; but his principles are dear to me, and I believe in all who defend them."

"You are a good daughter. I shall remember your words and cherish your approbation. Such words and such faith make men strong. What was your father's name?"

"John Darcy."

"I remember him perfectly. I heard him speak in Faneuil Hall, just after I left Harvard. I shall never forget the unction with which he spoke. It was before you were born? You are like him. I have not forgotten John Darcy, and I shall not forget John Darcy's daughter." How John Darcy's daughter could become the wife of Cyril King was an enigma, which upon further meditation he concluded he could not solve; yet any woman beholding Cyril King — though with perfect indifference — could have told the wherefore, without the slightest hesitation.

The senator from Massachusetts, his presence efflu-
ent

of high culture and great thought; his manner expressing all the ease, elegance, and repose which come not from scholarship alone, but from long and intimate contact with the rarest minds, with the most polished society; the fruitage of leisure, of travel, and of the finest companionship, — this man was not only endured but sought by many in spite of his “horrible” opinions. In majesty of mien as well as of mind, towering above the masses about him, he was a figure sufficiently conspicuous to attract numbers, if but through curiosity. Thus in a few moments he, with Agnes, stood the centre of a group that individually was far from being a congenial one. More than one member asked an introduction to Agnes on the supposition that she must be “a woman of mark,” or the senator from Massachusetts would not have spent so many moments in conversation with her.

Thus before very long Agnes found herself in the inquisitorial mental clutch of a rural gnat who, having seized her, had not the faintest intention of letting go, till he had extracted the last drop of possible information that he could draw from her. He was not a boor. By no means. Had he been, he would not have been here. He was a local great man, who imagined that he cast a shadow of personality as tremendous in Washington as he did at home. His position in political life was all that insured him an entrance here, and now he was here he was unhappy, and did not know what to do with himself, for he was an utter stranger to the titled and worldly great ones present.

Even they who were smaller did not seem to consider him of the slightest importance. This was more

than he could bear. Therefore he was trying to impress the magnitude of his greatness upon the mind of Agnes, who looked meek enough, he thought, to be unable to resist so weighty an impression. Instead, she soon suffered from the impression that she was rude to her orator. Why was this direful man talking to her about himself at such length, and with so much pomposity?

Before she was aware, she was replying to him in monosyllables, with little or no reference to his rhetorical ejaculations and rolling periods. Set after set was formed. The gay music, floating downward from the gallery, began to jar with actual pain upon her ears. The gliding and whirling dancers, filling all the central space of the vast hall, seemed to daze and strain her sight. And yet amid the hundreds who made that resplendent throng, she saw but two; they filled all her vision — they filled all her being now. She had overestimated her strength.

“I could have borne it for a little. It would not have seemed so hard if he had come back and made me feel that he remembered me; it is more than an hour since he left me. He has forgotten me.”

If aught could be judged by appearances, she certainly had cause to think herself forgotten.

The most conspicuous of all those dazzling couples were the two upon whom her gaze was fixed. His stature and distinguished face, her grace, beauty, and marvellous attire, made them central objects of attention even to indifferent eyes. Her face seemed to touch his shoulder, his arm encircled her waist, as in *curves* that were the very melody of motion they floated

past. Then as Agnes caught the expression of each face, absorbed in the other and in the dance, she said, "He has forgotten me altogether."

The mighty man from the country had departed, she did not know when, pocketing her as a new and conspicuous example of the deceitfulness of appearances. "She was stupid or had bad taste," he did not know which. He had made a mental note of each for future use. She was surrounded by smiling matrons, gorgeous in velvet, satin, brocade, and heirloom jewels. A senator's wife near her, pretty and *passée*, was discoursing on the disabilities and inequalities of the most favored woman's lot compared with man's, while her ponderous and elderly lord chasséd down the hall with a maiden in her teens. Another, complacent with the consciousness that she looked years younger than her companion, who had no grown-up daughters, and that her Parisian costume cost hundreds of dollars the more, crossed her jewel-glittering hands and discussed the probable name of her prospective grandchild.

"A son, *of course* a son. Why, we've not even thought of a girl's name, any more than if a girl were not possible. A son, Mrs. Midget, and to be named for his grandfather."

Said grandfather that moment came up, looking scarlet in the face, and panting with an apoplectic suggestion of over-exercise.

"My dear, why will you overdo," said "Mrs. Senator," "even to dance with the belle of the ball? Take a lesson in composure from me. I am not breathless or red in the face, and would not make myself so for the handsomest man on earth."

"No, I doubt if you would. The sense and dignity of the family are all lodged in you. But you are mistaken about the belle of the ball; where were your eyes? I didn't dance with her after all. I'm only tired and hot with baffled pursuit. Why, that new member, that young upstart, King, cut me out and has monopolized her nearly all the evening."

"Sh—h—h!" (just above a breath) with a wifely nudge, soft but sure. "She didn't hear, I'm thankful," marking Agnes' apparently oblivious face.

"Mrs. King, allow me to present my husband—Mrs. King, Mr. Peppercorn."

"Your most obedient servant, madame. I am slightly acquainted with your husband. A man of mark already in the House. A very strong and judicious speech that of his on Monday; the most popular of the session, and the most conciliatory. If there were more Northern men like him we'd hear no more of the dissolution of the Union."

"I'm glad if my husband's speech gave you pleasure," answered Agnes, scarcely knowing what she said, but in a dim way feeling thankful that it pleased somebody, as it could not please herself.

She had just been saying to herself: "Why do I take things so to heart? Why am I not serene and satisfied as both these women are? Their husbands have been dancing round dances all the evening, and they have been sitting here without them just as much as I without mine. They are perfectly satisfied; why am not I?"

The band struck up a national air. The assembly, which had been indulging in a promenade for the last few minutes, now, led by the President and court guests,

began to defile through the open doors to the supper-room.

A sickening sensation struck through Agnes' heart. Her throat grew parched. It seemed to her that she could not speak. In all her loneliness of a moment before it did not occur to her that it was possible, with the dance ended, that Cyril would forget or neglect to come for her. Almost a stranger there, as she was, he would not leave her alone. He would not, without coming to her, take another in to supper. This he had done. He was nowhere visible in the hall, neither was the face of his beautiful companion.

"Mrs. Peppercorn, I came to ask the honor of your company out to supper," said Hon. Mr. Peppercorn smiling gallantly, while Mrs. Peppercorn, with peacock-like dexterity, in one swing threw her voluminous plumage into place, and stood erect as a ramrod, as she took Mr. Peppercorn's arm.

"Perhaps Mrs. King will kindly accompany us?" she said, with real womanly kindness. She was not an especially penetrating woman, but she was woman enough to feel for another in a place which, she knew, would be extremely disagreeable to herself. "Snub me in private, Mr. Peppercorn, if you snub me at all," she said after the ball, referring to this scene. "But I *do* assure you, Mr. Peppercorn, that you would never find it possible to snub me twice in public."

"I am perfectly aware of that, my dear," said the well-trained Mr. Peppercorn, "therefore I shall never snub you once."

"You are very kind," said Agnes slowly, summoning

all her will to command her voice. "But I think that Mr. King will be here directly, and that I had better wait till he comes. He left me with a friend who I presume he expected would escort me. When he misses me in the supper-room he will be sure to come for me." It was a transparent, feeble little fiction, yet somehow it comforted Agnes to be able to utter it.

"Sure to come! perhaps—*when* he misses her, which will not be immediately. Look there, Mr. Peppercorn!" and the stately senatress gave a Juno-like nod in the direction of a gay group near, eating ices and salads, and drinking champagne, as if a ball-room supper was one of the chief joys of existence.

Cyril, as he touched his glass to Circe Sutherland, saw the nod and the meaning look sent after it in his direction by Senator Peppercorn, and both brought him to a very sudden consciousness not only that Agnes was not with him, but that she was nowhere visible.

She wouldn't be such a little goose as to sit in the ball-room and wait for him instead of coming out with another escort. Yet he did not feel so sure of that. She might.

He could not leave his party and go after her. Nothing could be so awkward as that Circe and Agnes should meet here. It was not to be thought of. No, if she was waiting she must continue to wait till he came. It was not pleasant to attract the attention of Senator and Mrs. Peppercorn. He would make all up before their eyes, later.

When he returned to the ball-room with Circe Sutherland on his arm, the first object that he saw was Agnes sitting where he left her hours before. Leav

ing Mrs. Sutherland with her party, he crossed directly to his wife.

"Why, Aggie, what on earth are you here alone for? I thought that Hugo or some one of your numerous admirers would take you out to supper. Of course I had to take out my partner. Haven't you had any supper? Then come with me."

She was too stung with a sense of neglect and loneliness now to look smiling; the dead ashen look was upon her face.

"Of course I thought that Hugo would stay with you," said Cyril, wishing to be conciliatory and to excuse himself.

"You could scarcely expect a stranger to do what you could not do for your wife," said Agnes.

"You were *not* his wife you see; had you been nobody but you would have expected him to stay; and even you, Aggie, told me to go and to do just as I would if you were not present. I have only done as you said you wished me to do."

"I meant it, Cyril. I did. But I thought you would come back just once. And — and it's so hard to be forgotten. Is this 'society,' Cyril, to forget and neglect your own for the stranger?"

"Well, yes, I believe it is."

By this time they had reached the supper-room. The crowd had already surged back to the ball-room. The table, which had been a marvel of epicurean art, was now reduced to *débris*. "What will you have, Aggie? An ice? A salad — oysters? What? Anything that you please, only say quick, for I am engaged for the first set, and there is not a moment to spare."

"Give me an ice, please, to cool my throat, and I'll not detain you, Cyril."

"I don't want to hurry you, Aggie — only you should have come in sooner. It never occurred to me that you would wait for me. I'm sure I saw any number of people about you, even the great abolition thunderer himself. Why didn't you come in with *him*?" in a half-mocking tone.

"He passed into the crowd long before you came back. Beside, Cyril, you would not have wanted me to come into the supper-room with him."

"Oh, yes, I would; he is distinguished and high-bred, in spite of his crazy brain. Beside, you and he are birds of a feather. There! The band! I must go, Aggie. I am engaged. There are the Peppercorns yet; you can come back with them. I will mention it to them as I go out" — and with these words he was gone, and she stood by the table alone. After Cyril spoke to them the Peppercorns came up to Agnes, and under their kindly escort she returned to the ball-room.

Cyril was still dancing as if dancing was the beginning and end of existence, and dancing with Circe Sutherland.

The hours grew late and long; how long, Agnes had no power to measure, only they seemed endless. The wall-flowers, save those who waited for dancing daughters and hilarious husbands, had one by one dropped off. The kindly Peppercorns with sincere regrets had bidden her good morning and gone home; yet the light, the music, the dance, the splendor of the ball, remained unabated. Cyril danced on. Agnes waited. And as she waited, her senses growing numb under the long

drawn out strain, Cyril in the dance seemed to drift farther and farther from her. "Why do I hope to hold him?" said her heart. "I have no part nor lot in such a life. And she! She will kill me."

He was not so lost in pleasure that he did not see her. Indifferent at first, as the throng grew less she grew more and more reproachfully apparent, more accusingly distinct; so he thought. Her very image there against the wall he felt to be a reproach, an accusation, a chill to him.

In the gray light of the morning they entered their carriage. Both were silent. Agnes remembered — when was it? away in another life? — when alone in a carriage like that he had drawn her close to his side like a little child, and his protecting arm had held her tenderly and surely there, close to his heart. Had he any heart now? If so, it made no sign for her. He sat erect and apart, like a stone image.

At last he said, "I hope you are satisfied now, Agnes, that it would have been much better for you to have been at home, abed and asleep. Why you should want to go to a ball when you cannot dance, I cannot imagine, unless it is to torment yourself. You are excellent in your place, but you must see for yourself, Aggie, that it is not your place to shine in society"

CHAPTER XIX.

TRUTH-TELLING : VAN NESS PLACE.

"WORSTED," said Agnes slowly to herself as she sat alone with her children, the morning after the ambassadors' ball.

"Cyril is right; my place is not to shine in society. Why did I deliberately take myself to a spot where I knew in advance that I must suffer, where it would be impossible to evade or to escape my suffering? Why? Ah! it was because I hoped — believed, almost — that if we were there together, he would not, he could not neglect me, his wife, for *her*! He could. He did. Before my open eyes he neglected me for her. Consciously, coolly, he left me for her. That fact can never be annulled. Can I ever forget last night? Never. I can never hear music again that will not bring it back. I can never see a geranium blossom that will not recall it. I believe I could never look upon dancing again — it would be more than I could bear.

"Oh, my heart! How it ached! I said more truly than I knew, that it would be an unequal match. Our weapons are as unequal as they are unlike. What was my devoted love of years before one glance of her eyes! Yet it is not love that she inspires. No, it is infatuation. He is infatuated. Can he help it? I know not. I only know that I could help it. The

man does not live, and never will, who could lure me from him even by a thought. But there is a difference. He has everything to hold me that I have not to hold him: beauty, genius, power. I wondered at the first that he could love me. Can I be astonished, now, that he leaves me in act and spirit? I have nothing, nothing but my love, to give him. What is that to him in the presence of such a face? Little. How little, I learned last night. Must I, can I learn to live alone, widowed in heart if not in life, — and yet live to any purpose, for my children, for anybody? My God! if it be thy will that I miss the highest joy, let me not miss also the deepest good! Do not suffer me to be *all* a failure! Alas, that I should feel that in losing love, I lose everything!”

“Here is a card for you,” said Linda, entering the room. “I encountered the lady in the lower hall; heard her inquiring for you; told her I’d give you her card, that you were in, disengaged, and I thought would see her.”

Agnes took the card and read, “Mrs. Duncan Sutherland.”

“Linda, I am not well, I am *not*,” and the ashen pallor that swept over her face proved the truth of her words. “I cannot see her.”

“You cannot! Why?”

“I — I do not like Mrs. Sutherland. I do not believe in her. I do not wish to know her. I have told you so before, Linda.”

“Yes, but you said that you admired her beauty. It is worth an effort to go and feast your eyes on that. She is certainly the most beautiful woman I ever saw.”

"Yes, Linda, I know how beautiful she is. It is a fatal beauty to me — I feel it — I know it. It seems as if my heart would stop beating when I look at her. What does she want of me? Does she come to insult me? All, all I ask of her is to let me and mine alone. I want nothing of hers. Not even her beauty. She only uses it to lead men astray. I'd rather be sinned against than to sin."

"You'll change your mind, or have a tough time of it," said Linda coolly. "What have you against Mrs. Sutherland? Why shouldn't she call on you? You are the Honorable Mrs. King, and worth cultivating. Now, I would like to go down just to take another look at her myself, but my opinion is, that you had better go yourself."

"I will go," said Agnes, as if moved by a new impulse. "You shall go with me, babies, both of you;" and she took her little son and daughter by the hands and led them out with her. With one on either side she entered the shabby parlor below.

Circe Sutherland was just thinking how very shabby it was, with its once fine but now faded furniture. "'Tis a pity," she sighed, "that *he* should have no place more in keeping with himself than this, in which to entertain his friends. Some day, perhaps" —

The door opens and Agnes with her children enters. She wears a black alpaca dress with narrow linen collar and cuffs, and a throat-tie of rose-colored silk — her simple breakfast and street attire, which can do nothing to soften the lines of pain which the pitiless morning reveals so distinctly on her features. Not so does it show the lady who rises to meet her. The all-night

dance has left no trace of weariness on the fair, unworn face, framed in its carriage bonnet of white lace lined with azure satin. Her close-fitting pelisse of black velvet is edged with ermine ; somehow in her attire Circe Sutherland always suggests the empress. She holds in her hand a bouquet of tea-rose buds, lily of the valley, and violets, which with an indescribably deprecating grace she proffers to Agnes at once.

“ Will you accept these flowers, Mrs. King, *please* ? I selected them especially for you ; they are like you,” with a winning glance. “ Pardon my early call, but I have tried so many days to come past two o’clock, only to get tangled in a list of receptions, and so fail to make it out. But I *do* owe you an apology. I have known Mr. King so long and so pleasantly, it has seemed quite like a fatality that we have not met sooner. I have promised myself so often the pleasure of making your acquaintance. Last night I thought I surely should, but whenever I glanced at you, you seemed to be the centre of such an admiring circle, such a *belle de conversation*, I would not venture. Then I did get absorbed in dancing. I may as well confess ; you could not help seeing it. I’ve a passion for dancing. I was born to it, I believe. And I’d apologize for persuading your husband into the folly so often, only I perceived all the ladies about you were equally amiable with theirs ; and yours is such a perfect dancer ! It’s such a comfort to dance with a gentleman who dances well, they are so very rare in this country.”

“ Are they ? ” said Agnes calmly. “ I cannot tell, as I was never taught to dance, nor allowed to attend dancing-parties but very rarely, before my marriage.”

"Dear me, how dreary ! You will never know how much pleasure you have missed."

"Probably not. Though last night I thought I had some comprehension of it."

"Did you?" with a quick inquiring glance. "I danced before I could walk, I believe ; I was born to it. And these are your children? How good of you to bring them down for me to see. Mr. King speaks of them so often, and of your beautiful devotion to them. He says that you perfectly live in them."

"Does he? Mrs. Sutherland, do you not think it fortunate for me that I *can* live in my children?"

"Most surely I do. All mothers do. They prefer to live in their children, do they not?" with a faint ripple of perturbation in the smooth voice.

"Yes. Any true mother chooses to live in her children, *with* her husband, — with *their* father, — but not to live in them alone, while he lives a life apart."

"Surely," says Circe Sutherland, her soft society voice coming nearer proving traitor to its habitual calm, by betraying unintentional emotion, than it had ever done before in her life. Never before has she been taken so utterly by surprise. It is she who is usually mistress of the conversation and the converser. Evidently here is one not easily managed intellectually, notwithstanding the impression she gives of physical weakness, and personal passivity. Is it possible that Cyril King's wife is in no way the weak creature that she has deemed her? She came here to pat her (mentally) on the back ; to patronize her ; to ask her to go out for a drive, partly for kindness, more for "appearances." Why can she do neither? Why does she

feel spiritually abashed in the presence of this perfectly unpretending, untravelled little woman in black alpaca?

"Mrs. Sutherland," said Agnes slowly, that she might hold in calmness the insurgent emotional vibrations of her voice; "Mrs. Sutherland, I heard all that you said about me to your friend in the alcove of the Congressional Library."

"You did!"

"I know your estimate of me as a woman, and as the wife of Cyril King. I have never held myself to be my husband's equal in any respect, save in my love of what is pure and true. I wish I were different in almost every way, for his sake — especially for his sake as a public man; but I am his wife. I love him, and him only. I shall never love another man. I could never be the wife of any other man. I am the mother of his children. As a woman, my life begins and ends in him. I can live for him, or die for him, and for no other man. Can you put yourself in my place, Mrs. Sutherland? If you can, how would you have felt had you heard another woman, a stranger, speak of you, Cyril King's wife, as you spoke of me?"

"I should have wanted to kill her. I would have killed her if I could!" says Circe, as if unconscious whom she is condemning to death.

"I wish you no harm, but happiness — a truer happiness than you know now. Yet I wish something of you, Mrs. Sutherland;" and Agnes, drawing her children tighter to her, leans forward from her low seat in intense earnestness. "I wish you to leave me *what is mine* That is all that I ask. I would not rob you.

I would not rob any one. I want only my husband, the father of my children. If I cannot know him to be mine in fidelity, in singleness of affection, what have I, as wife and mother, in this world? Nothing, nothing!"

"Have you no confidence in *him*?" says Circe, drifting helplessly to the first question she can ask. "What would his love be worth, if it could not be proof against any test? Beside, nobody on earth can take from you what is *yours*, and you could have no more love from him than your nature called out, if you were the only woman in the world. You speak as if your husband were at my mercy, as if I had nothing to do but to take him from you if I wished. If he is worthy to be all in all to you, how can you have so little faith in him?"

"I think that *you* know," answers Agnes, to whom the vocabulary of the Affinity Club is an unknown alphabet, but whose clear eyes look into the depths of Circe Sutherland's with a divining light. "I think that *you* know. You ask me if I have no faith in my husband. I have had *all* faith in him. I have loved him from a little child. I never loved another man. I know nothing of men save as I know them by him. Yet I know this, for the knowledge has been forced upon me,—and you know it,—that there are few men, very few, who could be utter proof against such beauty as yours, against such a woman as you are, if you willed that they should care for you, and threw your alluring influence over them. I don't believe that all would be equally weak, or equally tempted, but there would not be one who would not feel your spell."

"You flatter me, and you are the sincerest woman I ever saw in my life."

Agnes scarcely seems to hear this reply, as she goes on : " I did not know it once, but I know now that my husband has special temptations which a man less popular in society can never know. He shines in crowds, and is everywhere sought after. When I did not know this I fear I was too exacting. I supposed I could fill his need of companionship as he filled mine. I know better now. I do not wish to chain him to my side ; I want to go into society with him and share in whatever gives him pleasure." She thinks of the miserable failure of the night before, and is silent, while Circe Sutherland measures her from head to foot but makes no answer.

" I think now it can never be," she says at last. " I fear I was never made for what is called society. It is not easy to go against nature and the training of a life. I cannot assimilate to crowds. I live in a few ; supremely, I can live but in one. Will not this make you kinder to me ? Leave me him. You know what I mean. I would not rob society of his presence if I could. All I ask unbroken is his allegiance to me as my husband. You know it is this that you have assailed," and the divining light grows clearer in the clear eyes. " You assailed it from the beginning. You intoxicated him with flattery subtle as incense. You made him feel that he was dear to you. Was it in man to be indifferent to such beauty, combined with such homage ? When I was sick, shut in a darkened room, suffering for him and for this child, — when I did not know that you lived, — you did live to make yourself fair in the eyes of my husband. Did he not see you every day ? Did you not sing for him ? play for

him? make yourself beautiful for him? *Why* did you do it?"

"I did it because I cared for him."

"Cared for him! What right had you to care for him to such a degree? Had you been in my place, would you have been willing that I should have so robbed you of your husband's care and companionship and tender love?"

"I dare say not. But don't be unjust to me, Mrs. King. At first I did not know anything about you. I did not know that Cyril King had a sick wife. I did not know that he had any wife at all. He did not look married. He did not act married. And when I was told about his wife, I assure you, you were represented to me the opposite of what you are. 'Weak'! I never saw any one with such strength for truth-telling. Dear me, how you have lectured me! If you bring such a battery to bear upon him, no wonder he runs away from you."

"No, 'tis no wonder," says Agnes sadly, measuring once more with unclouded eyes the exquisite face and form before her.

"Now let me tell *you* a little truth, Mrs. King. Don't make me wholly responsible. 'Tis unjust. If I had never been born, such a woman as you could never hold in absolute loyalty a man like Cyril King. You are too truth-telling. If you want to keep a man's love, never tell him the truth. He will not bear it. No man will bear it, not if it is disagreeable; and the naked truth, as people call it, almost always is hideous. A man will bear the truth from a man, never from a woman, not if he loves her, or wishes to stand well in

her opinion. The moment that she dares to become his judge, his critic, she creates in him coldness, if not indifference, toward herself. The key to the entire arch of a man's love is flattery. Soothe his self-love, and you will be ever agreeable to him. Hint that he has a fault, and he will run away from you, if it is only to his cigar. Now I am absolutely certain, Mrs. King, that you were never displeased with your husband that you did not show it in some way, though you spoke not a word."

"I fear you are right," says Agnes meekly.

"It would not have gone so hard with you," says Circe kindly, "if you had known how to manage him. You have no *finesse*. You are too devoted for such a man. You give him no stimulus, not the slightest, in loving you. You made him sure in the beginning that your devotion was absolute, as endless as it is narrow; that no matter what he does or does not, no iota can be added or taken from it; that to you he is the only man in existence to dote on, to live in, to pronounce upon, and to bore — and you attempt to measure his devotion to you by the same irrevocable gauge. Now such a man sometime is sure to feel nagged by such a devotion. It wearies him, it worries him; and he will run away from it, somewhere, to something, if only to assert his own manhood. But if you could only give your husband a little home excitement by admiring some one else, — mind, I don't say falling in love with some one else, — you would give him a new stimulus to stand first in your opinion again. But if you insist on such absolute and exacting bondage, — what other word is there for it? — why, he will break away, though ever so little

into by-paths, to taste the stolen sweetness of forbidden fruits; there is no other help for it."

Agnes is silent before the to her new philosophy of this fair daughter of the world.

At last she says, "It is easy for you to say all this, you who have so much. I have but him. I want but him. Do not steal him away from me with your beautiful face and your alluring voice. Think of it! The world of men may be your kingdom. Under any conditions I could have but my husband. He is my all. In your heart you must know what it would be to have *all* taken from you. Say, I beseech you to say, that you will not rob me of my husband!"

"Your husband I do not want," says Circe Sutherland coolly, but kindly still; "I cannot say that I have not wanted an admirer, — a lover, even, though in no positively committed sense. But it was with no wish to rob you. I'm of the opinion still that no one of us can long hold anything which does not intrinsically belong to us. I've given you the best of advice how to bind your husband to you in devotion. If you fail to do it, it will be because it is not in you to be able to do it, — or in him to be bound. It will not be my fault. I am speaking the truth to you, Mrs. King, and nothing but the truth — something I can't always afford to do. Now I will be as honest with you as you have been with me. I care for your husband. All in all I think I care more for him than for any other man that I ever met. But if he were free, I can't say that I would marry him, for I don't want to marry anybody. I prefer my freedom, my kingdom, if you will. I never had any purpose to harm you, I scarcely thought of you

save as a nobody — as you know by the words you overheard, or I would not mention it. I thought of you only to pity him, that he should carry you as a weight. I pity him still, but I pity you more. You suffer and make others suffer from an excess of over-exacting virtues, more intolerable in one we live with, than sins — which, to tell the truth, are usually agreeable. But to prove to you that I wish you no ill, I will make a greater sacrifice for you than I ever made for any one in my life. I will go away from here — not to-day or to-morrow, but soon. I will go soon. And I am sure you can never know what a sacrifice I make for you, for just now it is the pleasure of my life to stay.”

“And you will never know with what gratitude I thank you. Look at these children! Could any passing pleasure ever compensate you for the knowledge that you had taken a father from his children? a husband from his wife? that you had broken up a home? What could he give you to atone for such knowledge?”

“The love of his eyes, the worship of his life,” thought Circe Sutherland; but she said: “You are the most dreadfully in earnest of any woman I ever saw. It would tire me to death, — and you must pardon me when I say that I should think it would tire your husband to death, — this eternal thrusting at him of the right and wrong of everything. Do you take nothing for granted? Do you accept nothing because *it is*, and is therefore to be enjoyed and rejoiced in, without question?”

“Yes, that which I have a right to, surely, — but never that which infringes upon the peace of another.”

“Well, we could come no nearer together were we

to talk on forever," says Circe, rising. "We do not stand on the same plane, we see nothing from the same angle of vision. What is symmetrical to one is distorted to the other, and could never be otherwise. Of one thing be sure, whatever may happen in the future I shall never speak to your disparagement again. I could never love you, for you disturb my good opinion of myself—which is not pleasant. But I respect you. I came here to give you these flowers, to ask you to drive with me, to say nothing that I deeply meant; whereas, I never spoke so unreservedly to any one in my life. You know me perfectly, therefore I have made no attempt to evade or to veil. You have spiritual insight and force beyond what I have ever found in one woman. By sheer moral power you have compelled me to be as sincere as yourself. I can bear it for once. But it would make me very uncomfortable to have you drop your divining rod into me very often. I prefer to hold it in my own hands and to sound the depths of other people. Your very presence would set me to questioning my own motives, and tend to make me dissatisfied with myself. I could never bear that, never, — and, as your friend, let me say your husband never will.

"How odd!" Circe goes on, as she stoops and kisses each child. "Your little boy is yourself over again, and this little girl is the image of her papa. How I wish you would let me take them to drive. *You* wouldn't drive with a sinner like me?" says the sweet alluring voice, while the small mouth droops and quivers like that of an injured child. "Ask mamma to let you go, little ones. Tell her I'll bring you back safe."

"Do, mamma! Let us doe," says Vida.

"Why, Vida?"

"'Twill jew me dood to doe."

"Yes, mamma!" pleads the boy.

"But you said you had a lesson ready to recite."

"What's a lesson, mamma, compared with my health and Vida's?" asks seven-year-old Cyril.

She is fairly beleaguered. She has never yet let her children drive out without her. This lady is probably right: she is over severe and puritanical. Even her she must have judged too hardly. Look at that lovely, pleading mouth, quivering like a child's.

"I will go," she says suddenly. "And you too may go, babies. I will not keep you waiting long," — to the smiling Circe, as she leads the children out of the parlor for their wrappings.

"So far, so good," says the musing Circe, now left alone. "It is more than I expected, far more, when I felt how surely she struck the nail on the head. I wish I was well out of it all. I wish I had never seen him. I wish she were the idiot I thought her. I wish he had just as little at home as I supposed. Then I could feel justified; now, unless I get far enough away from that face and voice, I never can. Mercy! to come to such a lecture! But I gave it back, and more, before she got through; that is some comfort."

Linda, up-stairs, thinks the world must be turned upside down, or the pillars of the universe shaken in some way, to have brought these two together.

"You couldn't see her, couldn't speak to her — and in an hour's time you are going out to drive with her. She must be a witch!"

"She is charming, Linda," is Agnes' only reply.

"Now tell me just where you would like to go, and there we will drive," said Circe, as Agnes and her children took their seats in her open landau.

"I would like to go to Van Ness Place; I intended that to be my next drive with the children."

"Van Ness Place! Where is it?"

"At the foot of Seventeenth Street. Have you never been there?"

"No. Nor ever heard of it. Tell me about it, please. I am a stranger in Washington, you know. To Van Ness Place, Pierre, foot of Seventeenth Street;" and the carriage turned toward the West End.

"It's the Burns cottage that I care most to see," said Agnes, "and that because it is so associated with Marcia Burns, who became Mrs. Van Ness."

"And who was Mrs. Van Ness?"

"The heiress of Washington! Her father owned all the land from Georgetown to where the Patent Office now stands. It was of this obstinate Mr. Burns, as President Washington called him, that he bought with much difficulty the site of the future city. Marcia Burns was then the only child of this old man. She was sent to Baltimore to be educated, and came back to be the belle of the first Congress assembled at the Capitol. I've just been reading that in the little log-house we are going to see, all the great people of that time visited,—Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, Burr, the Calverts, the Carrolls,—and that Thomas Moore slept in the little room off the kitchen on the ground floor."

"Dear me! It will be like visiting Shakespeare's

house at Stratford-on-Avon," said Circe, who was too polite to add that few things bored her more than old shrines and relics. "And this famous belle became Mrs. Van Ness?" she asked.

"Yes, she married the handsomest man in Congress. The record says he was 'well fed, well bred, well read.' After a while he built a mansion house a few rods away from the log cottage. It was designed by Latrobe. I want to see the mantel-pieces; they were wrought in Italy, and it is said are covered with sculptured Loves and Vestas, models of exquisite art. But Mrs. Van Ness always loved the log cottage better than the mansion house."

"Indeed! I suppose she was a very common sort of a person?"

"No, she was very uncommon, — an exquisite soul, it seems to me. Horatio Greenough, in his poem on her, says, —

"'Mid rank, and wealth, and worldly pride,
From every snare she turned aside.'"

"Oh, dear! what a wooden creature she must have been then!"

"Oh, no! You will not say so if you go and look at her portrait in the Orphan Asylum. It is as lovely as a Madonna. She founded and endowed the Washington Orphan Asylum after the death of her only child, Mrs. Middleton, who was buried with her baby in her arms at the age of twenty-two. After that Mrs. Van Ness used to go into the little log-house every day alone to meditate and pray. My nurse Chloe tells of General Van Ness' splendid equipage, with its six horses and liveried out

riders, — how everybody on the street used to turn and gaze after it; and the entertainments at the mansion house were the most splendid given in their day. Mrs. Van Ness was beautiful and elegant, but her heart was in none of these things. She knew about public affairs; she wrote poetry; her associations were all with the great of this world; yet her heart seemed to be with the poor and the suffering. She was the only American woman citizen whose body lay in state and was buried with public honors; yet the mourners who followed her coffin were the orphans whom she had cherished.

“It seems to me the most consecrated and holy life in the world, that I have ever heard about. I have thought so much of ‘the heiress of Washington,’ as she is called. That is why I want to see the little log-house in which she was born, and always prayed; and the mansion house in which she lived and died.”

“A beautiful life, no doubt, for any one who fancies it,” said Circe, “but it seems to me a dreadfully dreary one. What was the use of praying when her daughter was dead? It would not bring her back.”

“No, but it could help her to bear the loss. And by that daughter’s grave she consecrated herself for life to the orphan. Through loss she gave. Her memory is an inspiration.”

“To you!” said Circe Sutherland. “It is spiritless enough to me, I assure you. This must be the place.”

They had reached a high brick wall which shut in an entire square on the banks of the Potomac. Its tall gate stood open, the lodge by its side apparently having fallen into disuse. A broad avenue wound on beneath trees of forest growth, and in a moment they

paused by the Burns cottage, famous in the annals of the capital.

It is a low, sharp-roofed cottage, built of logs, and white-washed. Its doors face north and south, one opening on the grand old garden, the other on the broad river. Trees of immemorial years interlace in a green arcade far above it. The moss grows thick upon its sloping roof. The broad flagstones over which Washington and Jefferson passed are now sunken deep below their grassy borders. Its settled door-stones, its antique door-latch, its minute window-panes, are just the same that they were when Marcia Burns, beautiful and young, received within its walls her courtly suitors; just the same as when Marcia Burns, smitten and childless, knelt alone by its desolate hearth to commune with the God and Father of her spirit.

"A poor enough place," said Circe. "It's not so good as an overseer's house in Louisiana. Who can think of Carrolls and Calverts being entertained here? And the other's not so vastly better," pointing to the Van Ness house a few rods distant. "Pray, is that considered a fine house in Washington?"

"It was a wonderful house in its day," said Agnes. "It cost nearly sixty thousand dollars, and was modeled after the White House. All of Congress was entertained in that grand parlor every year. Look at this box! It reaches above the carriage door. It is round this circular drive, the wonder-mongers say, that the six horses of General Van Ness gallop headless every anniversary of his birth-night."

"How dismal! Well, the whole place looks dreary enough for just such ghosts."

"It does not look dismal to me," said Agnes, gazing off through a widening vista in the trees to the Potomac, flowing bright and broad beyond. "See how the river gleams in this bright atmosphere. See those white sails dip. And there is Arlington House! How plain its Doric pillars show through the oaks on the heights. Can you see it, Mrs. Sutherland?"

"Yes, plainly. A poor old place. Shan't we go back to the avenue now?"

"Certainly, if you prefer it;" and Agnes looked about the old garden with the resolve that when May brought its bloom she would come back to it again alone, with her children.

It was for this drive through the West End and on the avenue only, that Circe had asked Agnes to accompany her. It was not without mental effort of a rather severe quality that she brought herself to call upon Cyril King's wife. At heart she had never been reconciled to the fact of his having a wife. Not that she wished to marry him. But it irked her to remember that there was any woman living who held the right to question his exclusive attentions to herself. This feeling thus far had proved too strong for her usually ever-ready diplomacy. She had shown less than her ordinary tact in delaying so long her call upon Mrs. King. A lecture from Aunt Jessie of an unusually stringent character, that morning, sent her forth filled with a desperate resolve to make amends for all her past neglect, in a single visit.

"I will take her flowers, and will take her out to drive; and when the Peppercorns and all the rest Aunt Jessie is making such an ado about, see Mrs.

King and Mrs. Sutherland driving out in peace together they will say, 'There! A mistake after all! The two ladies *are* friends, though we did not know it.'

Aunt Jessie, a "wall-flower" on the opposite side of the hall at the ambassadors' ball, had been far from pleased with her all-night observations. Her moral sensibility received no shock, but her usually serene "sense of propriety" was jarred to positive irritability.

"If I did not see it I would never have believed that Circe would commit herself personally to disparaging comment," she said to herself. "I can't believe it, yet I'm afraid she is interested at heart in this Mr. King. How preposterous! If his wife were not present she might dance with him all night; or if his wife were present, and she too were dancing with somebody else. But that little forlorn image over there," — and Aunt Jessie fixed her glass upon it, — "that little forlorn image is enough to set the world inquiring after her husband and his doings, and for once Circe seems to be as blind as an owl to appearances."

A passing remark concerning *the* couple of the ball, from Mrs. Peppercorn, as the stately senatress moved on to the dressing-room after bidding Agnes good night, stirred Aunt Jessie to deeper irritation, which her brief and troubled morning sleep only deepened. Thus she met her beautiful niece at a late breakfast, charged with a lecture of an unusually portentous nature.

"It's of little consequence what people imagine about you, Circe, so they never imagine the truth. You are very rich and very handsome, but you are a woman; and because you are, you can't afford to have any ugly truths set against your character. Neither

money nor beauty could be an offset. You must remember that you are not in Paris."

"I wish I were, and with somebody else."

"Circe! You know I very seldom assert any authority over you. But I do now. You *must* cultivate Mrs. King, or give up Mr. King."

"I'll cultivate her," said Circe with a sigh. "Only stop scolding, auntie, do."

Aunt Jessie's worldly wisdom seemed mild indeed, compared with the utterly unlooked-for truth poured out by Agnes. Circe expected to encounter a weak, querulous invalid, — a grown-up child whom she intended to pacify with flowers, and to wheedle into taking a drive.

Those clear, divining eyes, the moment they were fixed upon her, put all her pretty policy to rout. Never had her placid tact been taken at such disadvantage. Never before had she been surprised from its stronghold. Outside of it, she was utterly discomfited. It is true she partly regained her ground afterwards. But it was only a half victory. It was scarcely that, for overborne by the heart truth pressed down upon her by this unhappy wife, had not she, Circe Sutherland, promised to go? to go out of her way, and leave to her — her husband?

Still, under the circumstances, it was some small comfort to know that she, with the assistance of the children, had overpowered this little woman, and won upon her sufficiently to take a drive.

"That is something in the eyes of people at least," said Circe to herself. Nevertheless, some way, at heart she felt vanquished.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed "Hon. Mrs. Peppercorn," as she stood gazing from her drawing-room window upon Lafayette Square. "After all I've told you of last night, Lulie, if here isn't Mrs. King and her children with that very Mrs. Sutherland! Come quick! There! They've turned the corner. She can't deceive *me*. Not after what I saw last night. It's all her Aunt Jessie's work. She made her call upon Mrs. King this very morning, and take her to drive, as a cover for last evening. She can't blind *me*. No, nor society."

"Is it too far for the children to the Capitol? Or perhaps you don't care to go?" Circe asked with a shade less than her usual *nonchalance*.

"No, not to the Capitol," said Agnes, with a white face. It seemed to her that not till this instant had she realized with whom she was driving. "We have had a long and charming drive; you have been very kind, — but we must go home now."

So she must lose the final triumph of the drive. It was hard. She was used only to conquest. But she could not conquer, or make subject to her own, the will of Cyril King's wife — that "poor, weak little thing," as she had been used to hear her called.

Still the drive did not wholly miss its effect. Society had other eyes not so keenly peeled as Mrs. Peppercorn's. More than one pair saw, while its accompanying tongue exclaimed: "There! There is Mrs. King driving with that Mrs. Sutherland. This is proof enough there is no truth in the stories they tell of Mr. King's being in love with her. If he was, of course Mrs. King wouldn't drive out with her."

CHAPTER XX.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH, AND THE SHADOW OF LIFE.

THE capital city of the nation to-day is a paradise for children. If you doubt it, just visit Washington on "The Children's Day;" when with banners, emblems, garlands, and ribbons flying, they march through the parked streets on a resplendent May morning. No city in the land can show fairer, fresher, happier children, or more of them. I doubt if any other city can show so many thousands who are at once healthy and glad in an untrammelled, unartificial childhood.

The cause for this may be found in the fact that the children of the capital have broader streets, freer and fresher air, live more in it, and closer to the life-giving earth, than the children of any other American city. This was not true once of the children brought to it strangers; who were born in higher latitudes, and who were never ingrafted into and nourished in its homes. How many children, used from birth to airy nurseries and grassy yards at home, have been brought hither into over-crowded boarding-houses and contaminated air, to die. Many a mother remembers Washington only as "the place where Marion died;" the spot which, "had I never seen it, Arthur would have been alive to-day." It is no easy matter for the transient

resident, in his cramped quarters, by his table of ill-assorted and villainously cooked food, to obey hygienic law, and once it was impossible.

It was May now. The city was all abloom. All starkness of hue, all crudeness of outline were lost, hidden out of sight in a wilderness of rippling greenery, swaying about the house-tops and weaving above the streets umbrageous arcades of leafy bloom. May is the "month of roses" here; the whole city was a garden of roses, clustering about the walls, peering through the fences, starting up by the wayside, everywhere pouring out from their hearts the most celestial fragrance.

"Mamma, take us to Van Ness garden, do!"

"Yes, my darling, you shall go," said Agnes, looking with sad eyes upon the face of her boy. "You and Vida shall go. A sweet lady who lives there says I may gather all the roses for you that I want."

Little Cyril was ailing. He was languid, restless, chilly and feverish by turns, yet with an ever-yearning cry to be "out, out." The ladies all said it was "malaria." If you have the toothache, or a fit of indigestion from a lump of sour and stony bread, or any ache or ailment under the sun in Washington, you are told that it is malaria. It is the very healthiest city in the land, as its sick and death rates show. Where in its broad, airy, and sunny spaces malaria hides, no mortal can tell; nevertheless every outrage of the laws of health and of life is denied or ignored under the cry of malaria.

"Your little boy is suffering from malaria. Give him two grains of quinine twice every day till he shows

no symptoms of the chills," said a native doctor called in, who gave a superficial glance at the child, which in no wise satisfied his mother. She had larger faith in fresh air and sunshine than in the doctor's prescription, and it was the day after he gave it that she went alone with her children to the Van Ness grounds.

As they passed the lodge and entered the historic garden, they found its high brick wall mantled with ivy and honeysuckle. Aged fruit-trees — apple, pear, peach, apricot, nectarine, and fig trees — clung to the old walls and lifted their crowns of tender fruitage into the late May sunshine. The gigantic trees — the maple, yew, walnut, and holly — wove a roof of softest shade over the warm turf below. Within its barricades of ancient box, the white stuccoed walls of the Van Ness mansion rose from out of beds and solid banks of budding and blooming roses. From the low windows of the eastern drawing-room spread out broad parterres of roses of every known variety, — the red, red rose with its spicy heart, the aromatic tea-rose, the virgin blush rose, the vestal white rose, the royal moss rose. Orange-trees from the conservatory were flushing in the open sunshine of the lawn. Honeysuckle in great masses of bloom hung from the balustrades of the southern portico, pervading the air with sweetness for acres away.

The freedom of the garden had been given to Agnes by the refined and gentle inmates of the mansion. Now for the first time availing herself of it, she left the carriage, and with a child on either side of her sat down on a low seat beneath a tree that tempered the sunshine which fell upon their faces, and ran in light

and shadow through the rippling grass. To her right, just the other side of the mansion, towered an apple tree that in its reputed century of life had dared to grow to the height and proportions of an oak. Beyond it the dome of the government observatory on Braddock's Hill, where the young surveyor Washington dreamed his first dream of the future city, swelled into the blue air. Before her, past the grassy border of the garden, spread the Potomac pranked with white sails. A lovers' walk, shaded by murmuring pines, ran through the grove down to a mimic lake, and there in mid-water ended on a tiny island filled with shadowy trees and restful seats. Beyond the garden, on her left, spread the capital city, and holding tutelary guard above it was its Capitol.

Just beside her rose the white walls and sharp roof of the Burns' cottage, embedded in lilacs and wild roses, while before her eight Kentucky coffee-trees towered high aloft, casting the shadows from their clustering crowns of more than a hundred years upon the cottage so fraught with the memories of buried generations, upon the white walls of the mansion rich in recollections of the illustrious dead of a later past; while through their palm-like leaves the quivering sunshine transfigured cottage and hall, and rested with hallowing radiance upon the faces of the mother and her children, sitting on the old seat beneath the trees.

"I'm goin' away," said little Cyril. His eyes seemed to follow a white sail-boat floating down the river.

"Where?" said his mother. "Do you want to sail to Alexandria? If you do, mamma will take you and Vida."

"I want to doe on a boat, I do," said Vida.

"I don't," said little Cyril; "I want to go home. Mamma, will you take me?"

The soft, searching mother eyes scanned the face of the boy, and as they did so the mother-heart leaped with a throe half of pain, half of premonition.

"Home! darling, do you want to go home? Papa cannot go. Would you want to go with mamma alone?"

"Yes, with mamma alone, and Vida. My papa don't want to go home."

"Your papa can't go home, not now; he can't till Congress adjourns — and this is the long Congress, Cyril."

"How long, mamma?"

"Oh, till July; as long as that, Cyril. If mamma brings you down every day to this beautiful garden, and takes you to sail on the river, wouldn't you rather wait for papa?"

"No. My papa don't want to go home. I want to go, mamma."

"Can you tell mamma why you want to go home, darling?"

"I'm so tired here," lifting his hand to his head; "I'm so tired. I'm tired all the time now. Maybe I wouldn't be, at home."

"Home! You shall go home, my darling boy, and mamma will go with you, if" —

"If she has not gone," her heart said, though her lips did not finish the sentence. Little Vida slipped from her seat on to the green turf, filling her little hands with the violets which purpled all the grass; but

the boy leaned his head upon his mother, and she drew him closer to her side, as she sat gazing through the shaded vistas of foliage out into the sunshine overflowing the blue atmosphere and the green earth. Her eyes seemed to rest upon the river, to follow the white sails idly drifting seaward; yet it was not them that she saw, or any outward objects.

She saw the face of Circe Sutherland, and she was chiding her heart for halting a single moment between the fear of that face and her duty to her child. Yet how much she feared that face, perhaps she did not know till this moment. "To leave him here without a safeguard, without his wife, without his children, with that face meeting him at every turn — can I?" she asked. "Why did she not go as she promised? Why does she stay to thrill him with that voice, to haunt him as I know she does? to torture me? It is too much to bear. The world is full of prey that she might lawfully make hers; why does she pursue the one idol that is mine? I cannot, I *cannot* bear it."

This last question had become the one absorbing idea of her mind, the central question of her being. Through it she agonized with destiny. Before it she shrank terrified and baffled at the shut door of the future.

She left the garden early, before a mist of miasma could rise from the marshes below the river, to penetrate the bland brightness of the air. She was thankful for the moment that even in solicitude for her child she could forget herself. Vida brought back a basketful of violets as her trophies. Little Cyril had seen a squirrel and two rabbits, which were sources of deep

joy ; but when the delight of telling about them and their houses was over, he sank again into the feverish restlessness and fitful slumbers of an ailing child. Vida, with shouts of glee, and a knot of violets in her nightgown, went off to bed with her Aunt Linda, while Agnes sat down by the couch of her boy, his little hot hand in hers, waiting his father's return, to consult with him on little Cyril's proposition of "going home."

When Circe Sutherland promised Agnes King to go away from the capital, she intended to keep her word. But even in the good impulse warmed into life by Agnes' pain and sorrow, she made a proviso for the reluctance to go, which even then she was sure that she would feel after : "Not to-day or to-morrow, but soon, I will go," she had said. It was March then. It was only May now. She was going to-morrow. "Surely that is soon," she said to herself, as she sat with an open novel of Balzac's in her hand, while her maid, kneeling before piles of costumes, of boxes, baskets, dressing-cases, jewel-caskets, toys, and trinkets innumerable, was solving the often-recurring problem of how they were all to be dovetailed into the back-breaking trunks yawning to receive them.

"Do be careful, Cecile ; that was only given me yesterday," Circe exclaimed, as the maid rather impatiently dropped a delicately-carved alabaster jewel-box into the satin-lined case that was to protect it ; both the gift of Cyril King.

"Yes, I know it's new — that's what worries me," said Cecile. "No matter how much room there is in the trunks when we come, there is never enough in **them** when we go away to hold all the new things

"I can't make room for 'em all, without packin' so close they'll break," she said, with a tone and look of despair, as she glanced from the mountains before her to the trunks.

"Very well; then go and get another, — or half a dozen others, if necessary," said Circe, as she took up her book with perfect unconcern.

At that moment Cyril King was walking along the avenue toward Willard's. He had left the House at least an hour before its adjournment, something that he did very often now, — how often, he himself did not know. In truth, at the present time, of no subject whatever was he so ignorant as of the real state, mentally, morally, and emotionally, of Cyril King. A man no more than a bird can analyze the spell which enthalls him, when all his faculties are held in suspension by some overpowering exterior charm. A man superlatively strong in moral force can shake off the charm, make himself free, define and condemn it; but never while under its immediate influence.

But Cyril King was not morally strong. The only torpid force within him was his conscience. Had it been keen and quick like his imagination, he would not have been the Cyril King whom we know. As a man thinketh, so is he. Social freedom was the favorite theme of the Affinity Club. Social liberty in its bearing upon the liberty of the individual was the only social problem which had interested Cyril in the slightest, the only one which had entered into his thoughts, which had received the verdict of his approbation, and which was beginning already to bear fruit in his conduct. The fatal fallacy in all self-assumed "reforms"

is that they strike at the roots of social order and personal peace, in the name of the greater good. The man rushing on to consummate his own selfishness; the woman drifting out, with no anchor to hold by, into the sea of limitless desire, if given to a false philosophy, declare themselves to be "right" as well as "free."

Cyril King had come to the conclusion that Agnes was at once unreasonable and unsatisfying. She was his wife, the mother of his children, — two facts he had decided never to forget, but to pay such dole on them as he saw fit. Outside of his relation to her, he assumed that it was not only his privilege but his right to take what he wanted and what he could get, "provided," quiescent conscience added, "you give all to Agnes that you would if you had naught else." "How can I give her what she does not call out, which, therefore, by no spiritual law can belong to her, but which *does* belong to another, because she spontaneously inspires it?" he would say, if inert conscience ever roused itself to ask a troublesome question. Imagination, electric and luminous; desire, deep and strong, — together stifled this feeble conscience so that it but seldom made a sign.

Cyril said truly to Agnes, years before, at Tarnstone, that it was the fruits forbidden that he wanted. For him possession left too little space for imagination, desire, hope, to hold revel together in his strong but un-governed nature. Thus, however coveted before, the thing possessed lost all exciting charm to him, because it was his. It was the thing that was not his, and that he could only obtain by difficulty, or not at all, that he wanted. It would have been torment enough for either

to have been shut up for a life-time with the other, but as there was not in their minds the slightest probability of this, there was nothing at present which Cyril King and Circe Sutherland so much longed for as each other's society.

Willard's was the daily evening meeting-ground of politicians and statesmen. Party caucuses were not unknown to its parlors. The lobby congregated in its offices, and statesmen, arm in arm, in its halls paced up and down, discussing measures momentous to the nation. Thus nothing could be more natural than that "a new man" and "a wide-awake man," like Cyril King, should be a regular evening visitor.

To Agnes' "Shall you be gone long, dear?" nothing could be readier or easier than the answer, "Well, yes, I may, I'm going to Willard's to meet a man. No telling when I shall find him, or how long he will keep me when I do. Don't sit up for me."

He not only "met a man," but many men, in that crowded caravansary; but considering the tenacious habits of politicians, it was surprising how soon he shook them off, and rid himself of them, and found his way into the private suite of parlors leading from the public ones, in which, with her Aunt Jessie, Circe Sutherland held her evening court. It was more than the Affinity Club that met here. All "society" came to these popular and resplendent parlors. Why should they not? The dazzling woman, the polished and versatile conversation, the alluring music, the enchanting voice, would have filled these parlors with the most attractive of men and women in any capital on earth. Through all the gray Lenten season there had been no centre of

light to compare with these informal "evenings" of Mrs. Sutherland. What wonder that she had not kept her promise to Agnes, and gone sooner! Was it Agnes' husband only who felt the force of this magnet? Was not all the gay world at her feet? Cyril King, dropping in quietly and as a matter of course from the outer saloons, met her as hundreds met her, and shared her society on common ground with the rest of the world.

How was it, then, that when the business of the House would allow it, he now slipped out before adjournment, and that the hour before dinner was so often spent in that inner parlor with only one, and that one Circe Sutherland? He himself did not know how it had come to pass. He had not even paused to think that that hour had come to be to him the hour for which all other hours were made. He did not realize how the desire within him had been buoyed up and borne on by a desire more potent beyond himself.

"Never a moment for our old talks," said Circe Sutherland. "Crowds, crowds forever in Washington. It's Emerson, isn't it, who says, 'Two only can converse; a third person is an impertinence'? That's the idea. I never quote verbatim. Does that tedious House *never* adjourn before five o'clock? If it does, do drop in some day. From four to five is my hour, these Lenten days, — my very own. I will have it for my books, my music, my pet friends. I've asked nobody yet but *you*."

"I feel your kindness," said Cyril, with more than a flush of pleasure.

"It's no kindness. I *want* you to come. *Do come*. I'll play for you *your* music."

With what delicious thrill the honeyed poison of these words ran through his veins, from heart to brain, from brain to heart. Did she measure the fatal influence of the flattery that she distilled? Surely not. Her only thought was that it must influence to bring him nearer to herself. Once out of Agnes' presence, beyond the gaze of those appealing eyes, beyond the moving tones of that pleading voice, Circe was herself again, applying with relentless logic the conclusions of her own chosen philosophy: —

“‘Her husband!’ I want nobody’s husband. I want *no* husband, no judge, no master; not I! I want the man: his thought, his admiration, his homage. Could I have these and be his wife? Not long. She has lost them if she ever had them, because she is his wife. She killed them with her truth-telling. No glamour, no poetry, no passion, could live a minute in such an atmosphere. I would not rob her. I want what she cannot have, and I will have it, — but I’ll keep beyond the sound of that voice and the look in those eyes; they move me against my-elf. Why did I allow Aunt Jessie to over-persuade me to call on her? Before I saw *her*, I took pleasure in the thought of him alone. Now, the expression of her eyes, and the tones of her voice, and the words she said, mix with memories of him. A drawback — yes, in spite of myself, a drawback; for though I know that she is over-exacting and mistaken, I’m sorry for her. That is no reason why I should not take my own — what she could not have if I were not in the world. But there is a force in her of some sort, else she could never have made me promise to go. What *made* me promise? I’m

sorry I did — but because I did I must keep my word."

She was thinking of him now. He filled all the undercurrents of her thought, even while her eyes listlessly ran over the pages of Balzac. "Who, in looking back over the happiest portion of his life, can single from it all one perfectly happy day?" she read. "Surely not I," she mused. "Something I've missed, or itself missed me! Of all that I call mine, what makes me so happy as the glance of his eyes, the thrilling tone in his voice, the touch of his hand? And I am going to-morrow, just to keep my word. I need not have gone. I will come back; or he shall come to me. Ah, I shall know by his look, when I tell him that I am going, how much he loves me."

A servant brought in a card, and with the book still in her hand, and tears in her eyes, Circe went into the adjoining parlor to meet her expected visitor.

"Tears!" exclaimed Cyril, as advancing to take her hand he saw two gleaming drops quivering on the long, dark eyelashes. "Tears! Who *dares* to make you shed one tear?" and he led her to a sofa.

"A trifle, something that makes many people glad. I shall leave Washington in the morning."

"Leave Washington! No. You must not." The deep pallor that overspread his face betrayed more than his words.

"But I must."

"Must? Your must I thought was what you willed."

"What can you say when I tell you that I willed to go — that I willed sufficiently to promise to go? I must keep my word."

"Promise! Who could move you to such a promise? Who dared to claim" — and a pang of jealousy shot through his heart.

"Your wife."

"My wife!"

"*Your* wife."

"You acquainted with my wife! I never dreamed of it."

"I met her once. It was not a pleasant interview. I am not surprised that she did not mention it. I called on her one day, the day after the ambassadors' ball. She is a very truthful person. She left me in no doubt as to what she thinks of me — and of my influence upon you. It seemed never to have entered her mind that *your* influence over me might be far the more powerful. The sum of my offending was in influencing you, in taking you, she called it, away from her. You know that I do not believe that one *can* be taken from another; that what we lose, we lose through some lack in ourselves, or through some excrescence of our natures which repels and drives from us that which we would bind forever to us. But I cannot, however unwittingly, be the cause of pain to any one," — in the gentlest voice. "So I promised Mrs. King I would go away soon. I intended that it should have been sooner, but found myself so involved in preëngagements I could not go. I thought I would not mar for myself the few pleasant hours left, by telling you. Are you sorry a little that I am going?"

Cyril was silent. This sudden blow had struck far below the sources of his surface fluency. Circe Sutherland was not disappointed. Her words, the knowl-

edge of her departure, affected him as deeply as she desired, more deeply than she had dared to dream that they would.

Chagrin mingled with his regret and pain. She was going, not only, but going because Agnes wished it and asked it. Even now he did not forget all that was due to her as his wife; he would not speak to her disparagement, neither would he attempt to hide the pain he felt at the sudden going of the absorbing creature by his side.

He turned to speak some word of regret; it was arrested midway between mind and heart, unuttered. Surely the grief expressed in the bowed head, the half-veiled eyes, the quivering tears, the trembling mouth, so tender and infantile, was not feigned. For him! all for him! this wondrous loveliness of sorrow. He had turned to give but the faintest utterance to his own, forgetting himself in the thought of losing her, — not in one pulsation asking that she should sigh for the coming loss of his presence, — and her look, her whole attitude, made his heart stand still with a sudden joy. She, the world's queen in his eyes, was filled with grief at the thought of going from him!

The impulse rushed through him to snatch her to his heart, to tell her that the world and its kingdoms of riches and glory were nothing, nothing to their love. For she loved him. He knew it, he felt it now. It was the knowledge of it that seemed to take his breath away. Triumph? Life had never given him a triumph till this moment. It was stamped on the face of this woman in the love it bore for him.

Did he forget? No, not even then. Memory laid

an icy hand upon the rein of passion. Could he have forgotten, as many a man has forgotten, in one overmastering moment, all, all but what the moment held of love for him before his eyes — could he have forgotten, with what ecstasy of confession would each have crowned the other.

“Circe,” he said, and grew paler with the consciousness that he had called her by her name for the first time, “Circe, it was not strange that Mrs. King wished you to go. You, I see, do not blame her; you who know better than she can what cause she has to wish you to go. But it can do her no good. Stay!”

“No, I promised.”

“It will do her no good. It has done her harm already. Had she not pressed it, I might have learned later, at least, that life — my life — is nothing without you. It is your going that reveals it; your going that will make it harder to bear — for her not less than for me. I — I could not bear the sight of her, of anybody, who had banished you from my eyes. Stay!”

“I cannot; I promised to go.”

At this moment Aunt Jessie came into the room from her afternoon drive, and with one of those swift transitions of which mortals are capable, Circe and Cyril fell at once into commonplaces on the weather and current events, as if they had not for an instant pursued anything else. Cyril refused an invitation to dine, and accepted another to “drop in again during the evening.” “Come rather late,” said Aunt Jessie, “then perhaps you can afford to take an hour after callers have gone, for a game of whist.”

Another moment and Cyril stood in the public office,

discussing the merits of a financial "bill" pending before the House, with an earnestness that might indicate that he had thought of nothing else for the past twenty-four hours. Under all this matter-of-course surface ran unceasingly the undercurrent of one thought and emotion.

He was on the street presently, wending his way toward his lodging-house — and reality. He came in sight of it. He saw, mentally, Linda and Agnes and his children. He saw the boarding-house table, the uncoalescing assembly round it; smelled its conglomerate smells, so offensive to his fastidious sense; set all against what he had left: and with one of those sudden revulsions of feeling and act characteristic of him, he turned about when within a rod of the door, and walked away far faster than he had approached the house.

He took a solitary meal at Goutier's, spent an hour talking politics with the crowd at the National, a little after nine sauntered along the avenue toward Willard's, and at last with bated breath entered its inner parlors. They were still thronged with guests, and Circe was playing — playing ostensibly for the company, yet playing his favorite music. He knew she meant that he should feel, that with the parlor full of brilliant and attractive guests, her music, her thoughts, her heart, were all with him. It was the utmost measure of flattery and of temptation — brimmed, overflowing. Public success he had believed to be in store for him; social recognition also, in a general way. But amid the family cares, and settled, married, finished feeling of his later years, it had never crossed even his imagination that there waited for him still the idolatry of another

woman, and of such a woman! Who else was so favored among men? And now with the first taste of the too potent sweetness of this cup, just as he had come to know all that it was to him in this unguarded present,—to drink it, to cling to it in defiance of fate and of the future,—it was to be taken from him. She was going. All this—and how much more!—rushed through the brain of Cyril King, standing there in utter placidity, apparently, near the piano, turning from the player occasionally to exchange a look or word of approbation with Aunt Jessie.

No one else was asked to remain for the game of whist. It was Aunt Jessie's game, and she delighted to have it chiefly her own way by playing into the hands of "dummie." Cyril cared nothing for the play, but everything for having Circe as his partner. Both played indifferently; Aunt Jessie indefatigably and triumphantly. She had scarcely thought of a final rubber, when Cyril, looking at his watch, exclaimed,—

"One o'clock! and you to go in the morning! Forgive my thoughtlessness in staying."

"It is mine if anybody's," said Aunt Jessie. "But really, it's no matter. Circe will have as much sleep as if you hadn't stayed. The journey's short, and what has either of us to do but sleep at its end?"

Was he to have no parting all his own? No. Aunt Jessie attended to that. She felt not the slightest compunction at keeping him from his family till past one of the morning, but she had no idea of defying "the proprieties" by leaving her niece to say good-by to the gentleman alone, at that unusual hour. One

long glance of the burdened eyes, one faint pressure of the child-hand, one word of murmured farewell — his, his only, these — and Cyril King was again on the street under the morning stars.

“Home!” “Home is where the heart is;” and surely his, that moment, was not in the lodging-house. He would not go near it; he could not, not in his present state of feeling. Putting his hand on his pocket he felt for the key of his committee-room. He found it. He would go to it, and there on the sofa spend the few hours left before daybreak.

Slowly — how slowly! — the night dragged on, while Agnes slept not. Cyril’s absence from dinner was not remarkable. Another “member” at the table saw him before he left the Hall of Representatives. “He went away before adjournment,” the gentleman said. “The House was in ‘committee of the whole.’ He could leave as well as not, so he told me that he would go and attend to some important business of his own. Still he said nothing of not being back to dinner.”

Agnes held the hand of her boy, and every time the door of the lower hall opened, her pulse quickened and her heart beat fast with hope. The sunset red touched with rosy glow the walls of her room, and slowly faded out into the cold gray of dusk at last. A servant came and lit the lamps.

“It is evening already; he must come in a moment,” she said. The hall bell gave a sudden, peremptory ring. How well she knew it, — it was like no other, — the evening ring of the carrier of the congressional mail. A servant brought into the room Cyril’s portion, a huge packet of newspapers, and of yellow-enveloped

letters from his faithful constituents, tied with red tape. His evening mail — he was always in to look over that. He must come in a moment, now. Never before did the bell ring and the front hall door open and shut so often, it seemed to her. How many times she started with hope, — belief, almost, — to sink back in disappointment. She heard a step on the stairs, a clear, quick step. It was Cyril's, she was sure. It came near, nearer. It had reached the room. "Cyril!" she cried. It passed on; it was gone, ending at a distant door. She pressed her face against the window-pane. The flickering street lamp, with its plank of light wavering out to the corner, revealed no familiar form drawing near to the house. Once, for an instant, she caught a glimpse of the figure of a man. It must be he! No, it was only a watchman strolling leisurely along his nightly "beat." She had not dared to look at the time before. She was so afraid the hour was later even than it seemed. She looked now. It was one o'clock.

"Cyril, where *are* you?" she moaned aloud. "I cannot feel that harm has befallen you. Something seems to say to me that you are safe — somewhere, but where? Not with *her*. No, that is impossible *now*. But where? What keeps you? Has ill come to you? my husband, my husband!"

She took a book and sat down beside the shaded lamp. It contained the story of Orestes, which she began the day before. She tried to read; tried to trace through the web of that tremendous plot the working out, the unity of moral law, — Zeus' lesson to mortals: "Learning through sorrow." But the tired soul refused to follow it. Clytemnestra, Iphigenia! **Wha**

were the crimes of the avenging queen, or the sacrificial death of the murdered virgin, to this heart of a far after day, bleeding with its own wound! Sorrowfully she shook her head over the words of Agamemnon:—

“Fame lifts
High her clear voice. To be of humble mind
Is God’s best gift.”

“I have never found it so,” she said. “Are there the sad, prophetic notes of truth?”

“But be the issue as it may,
Eternal fate will hold its way:
Nor lips that pray, nor eyes that weep,
Nor cups that rich libations steep,
Soothe those dark Powers’ relentless ire,
Whose altars never flame with hallowed fire.”

Her boy moaned in his sleep. She went to him, threw herself on the couch beside him, took him into her arms, and thus, overcome with exhaustion, at the early morning, sank into a troubled sleep. It was full day, and she had not wakened. The unshaded morning light from below the lifted curtain fell full on her face, as Cyril King stood and gazed upon her.

She was his wife. Not the lustrous beauty by whose side he sat last night; but this wan and weary woman on whom the revealing sunlight now shone in so cruelly, bringing out in keen distinctness every line which pain and grief, working outward, had left in heavy trace upon her face. Before the sensuous, pleasure-loving man, the faded woman is ever at painful disadvantage. Cyril King! Who could have made him believe, once, in the days when he wooed the innocent girl beneath the maples of Ulm, that some time, further on, he could

stand and gaze upon her face as he was gazing now? With indifference? With more than indifference; with a keen, cruel criticism; seeing with artistic vision every defect, seeing with eyes unsoftened by one lingering thrill of tenderness. He was tired of her, thoroughly tired of her! But half conscious of it, he had never owned this to himself before. The conviction transfixed him now, without apology and without reservation. Was it not enough that she could not fill his life, without her presuming to send from his sight one who was the delight of his eyes? This was her offense, this was it which had suddenly in him turned indifference into hardness of heart. His thought and his feeling full of another, what could this poor wife do or say now, which haply might touch some chord in his nature, reaching back to that supreme moment of youth when he wooed her, loved her, and made her his own! If that word or that deed existed, she knew it not. With the most sensitive sense of fitness in all her dealings with others, she had no power of *finesse* with him. She awoke. The long night of loving vigils, the searing tears, the true, deserted heart, all spoke together.

“Cyril! You *have* come. Where were you?”

“Busy. When I got through, it was so late I stayed in my committee-room.”

“I wanted you so. I wanted you to look at little Cyr. He seemed so feverish. Look at him. Does he seem very sick to you?”

“No. Why are you forever in a fidget about that child? He would be well enough if you would let him alone. He has taken cold. Children are always taking cold, and getting over it if they are not dosed.”

"I expected you last night. I was sure you must come. Why didn't you come?" with a troubled air.

"I told you I was busy; beside, Linda said that you were going to the lecture."

"Linda! lecture!" and her voice quivered with resentment now. "Linda seldom tells the truth of me. And *you* know that I would go to no lecture without you."

"More's the pity." He looked amused. He was thinking that he had never seen Agnes look so ugly as she did this moment, sitting upon the couch with the gray light pouring upon her face. This consciousness filled him, as he gazed upon her coolly and deliberately, still holding his morning cigar smouldering between his teeth.

She read his thoughts. They stung her.

"How coldly, how critically you look upon me!" she exclaimed. "How tenderly I have thought of you!" and she burst into tears.

"Scene!" he sneered. "Well, I am used to it; cry away."

"Why do I live!" she moaned. "You spent your evening with *her*. I am sure of it. It was all the same to you that your child was sick, that your wife watched alone the whole night through,—you was with *her*! Oh, why do I live!"

"I am sure I don't know—to torment me, I suppose."

Not a pulse in his heart moved toward her. She did not look pretty. There were purple rings around her eyes. Her nose was red. She troubled him; she was in his way.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. PEPPERCORN'S ADVICE.

HUMAN experience holds no second blow so smiting as the first cruel words uttered by the one loved best. They may be repeated; but the benumbing shock of utter astonishment can never again add paralysis to their wound.

Cyril had spoken to Agnes thoughtlessly, unkindly, contemptuously even, at times; but never with cruel heartlessness before. Nobody on earth had the power to make her believe him capable of wanton cruelty of thought and speech. Nobody living could so convince her but himself, and he had done it. He had done so now rather than earlier, because now for the first time she had positively interfered with him, and placed herself in the way of his pleasures. He would forgive no one for that — least of any one his wife.

His words were less unkind than his look and manner. As Agnes gazed and listened (it seemed to be with a suspended consciousness), she saw his eyes faded in color, fierce in light, — a pitiless, feline light, casting its ire upon her, — the cruelty of the thin-lipped, sneering mouth; and to her it was not Cyril, or if it could be, it was a Cyril whom she before had never seen or known. Nor could it be she, the Agnes of every day who looked, listened, and quivered beneath the lash of his scorning and remorseless tongue.

Had she been an ordinarily weak woman, stung by indifference and contempt she would have retorted, "I will get out of your way." Had she been what is termed "high-strung" in temper and feeble in conscience, she would have resolved to "pay him back in his own coin." She uttered no such word, she made no such resolve. She was conscious of nothing save the stunning blow which seemed to penetrate to every tissue and fibre of her being.

She still sat upon the edge of the couch, the gray, revealing light remorselessly bringing out every line and shadow of her face — of her face lifted to his. At last she drew her hand slowly across her eyes as if to clear her vision.

"This is not *you*, Cyril," she said softly ; "not *you* ! If — if it can be, I know you will be sorry some day."

"You can come no pathetic dodge over me," he answered. "That is all played out. Nor the lofty moral dodge either. I'm just as good as you are, though you have made it your business ever since we were married to assume a superiority of sanctity. It comforts you, no doubt, for you can't help knowing that you are my inferior in every other particular — yes, my inferior," his rage cumulating as he went on. "I shall never be sorry, never, that I told you the truth ; that you heard it at least once in your life, madame."

Linda opened the door before this sentence ended, and as she heard it, and looked from the husband's to the wife's face, she was for the first time sure that that for which she had worked and watched so long in silence at last had come to pass.

She did not, however, by word or look betray this

consciousness; the time had not come for that. Instead, she went directly to the sleeping child, and throwing back the covering from his face said to Cyril:—

“If you care to save him, you had better tell us to take him home.”

“I have no objection to your taking him; and the sooner you both go, the better,” was the answer.

It was now Linda's turn to be astonished, if she had not been so much more enraged. The same blood flowed in her veins which flowed in his. Far more than he, she had felt the revengeful currents of its underflow; far more, because in her they had never ceased to beat against the barriers of her lot. Rarely, perhaps never, had the “bad blood” in him turned against her; rather on its loftier level it flowed serenely with her. A mightier than she had arisen. Toward this new lode-star the tide of his nature had set. By instinct she knew it. He was further from her than he had ever been before; further from her power over him. She knew this by instinct. Their eyes met in a single glance. How strangely alike was the expression in each! Neither needed an added sign to interpret the other.

She had triumphed surely, so far as Agnes was concerned. But what of it? Because of it she was no nearer to him. True to the fiat of her fate, she was still alone. And in that instant, seeing him as he was, seeing that she had missed him finally and altogether, in that concentrated glance she felt that she hated him.

Mechanically, as if moving in a dream, Agnes that day folded and packed away her own and her children's

garments before returning to Lotusmere. Moving in her dream, stunned and hurt, she hoped, — faintly as her benumbed spirit compelled, — still she hoped. She did not even know it. Yet no less she hoped. She hoped that when the excitements of this new life which she had learned to loathe were past, this stranger Cyril would pass with it, and the early Cyril of her young love would come back. For this youthful Cyril as she believed him to be, as she loved him, and wedded him, she was forever looking and forever yearning.

No matter what the actual Cyril said or did, this wife of his youth, this playmate of his childhood, this first champion between him and fate, who even as a tiny girl was brave enough and strong enough with her words of loving truth to put to rout all the sneerers and scorers of his boyish world — she, through all stress of doubt and fear, of sorrow and neglect, swerved not in fidelity or love to this ideal Cyril, who through her childhood and youth had grown into a man whom she had never ceased in a wifely sense to worship.

The actual Cyril caused her to suffer and to sorrow; he was veining all her life with pain; she saw him and knew him as he was; yet she saw no less clearly, though with spiritual vision, the glorious image of that earlier Cyril, in whose coming back she never ceased to hope or to believe. In this hope and faith she lived. This faith and hope were stirring and living now, under all her wounds. They held the tears back from her sad eyes, they thrilled the delicate hands to labor; sometime, sometime this fever in his veins would die, this delirium would end, and Cyril — her Cyril — would come back to his home, to his wife, to his children.

Of course the Hon. Cyril King accompanied his family to the railway station. It was a pleasant-looking carriageful which rolled past the early pedestrian on the avenue that morning, — the handsome member and his delicate wife, and the two beautiful children, whose loveliness was sufficient to obliterate, in passing, the ominous-faced woman who held the boy on her lap.

"I told you that she and I would soon go sailing away together in the same boat, and you said no, of course no," Linda managed to whisper in Cyril's ear as he bade her good-by.

Did he feel no tender compunction, as leaning down in the car he accepted his wife's parting kiss? Perhaps. But it was too faint to rise above the ascendant and overwhelming sensation that now — now, for a time at least he was to be free. No Linda to dog his steps; no wife to "nag" him either with looks, tears, or sighs.

"Liberty, thou art sweet!" he exclaimed in his melodramatic fashion, as he turned the first corner from the station, and threw up his arm as if he were apostrophizing the lamp-post, and his face to the sky as if he were making a proclamation to heaven. In a moment he was out of sight to the eager eyes peering through the car window, but not so was the capital. With all her heart-aching and longing, with all the pressing claim of her personal need, her soul continually went forth to that which was outside and beyond it. It brooded now over the city of the nation with love akin to that which moved our Lord to weep over Jerusalem. She saw the Virginia hills fade into blue air, and the white walls of the Capitol grow dim and ~~die~~ *out* in the distance.

Should she ever see them again? What fate would time bring to them? Would the torch of revolution ever flame beneath that stainless dome? Would it survive unscathed, the trophy of victorious war, the perpetual crown of triumphant freemen? Or would it be bruised by factions, broken by anarchy? How was the fierce strife beneath it to end? Would the passions of men yet destroy each other and their country, or would Truth and Justice survive all stress of struggle, to rise at last supreme? Would constitutional freedom live forever more? Would the republic never perish? Within its august Capitol gathered and concentrated this woman's deep and abiding love of country. To her it was the Caaba of liberty. Every stone in it was dear. She could forget for a time the pain in her own heart, in the thought of her country, and in forecasting its future. With a sigh and a prayer she saw the Capitol fade out of sight. How she would miss the Congressional Library with its exhaustless treasures, her chosen nook in its alcoves, the manna of wisdom which she had gathered there without stint! Yet she was glad that she was going home. The surface life of the capital oppressed, it was killing her. She did not love it. She did not believe in it. Yet the capital itself was dear. She loved its broad, river-bound vistas, its gardens of roses, its purple atmosphere, its Mediterranean airs.

But home was dearer, far dearer, she said, as she sat with her children on the little pier of Lotusmere in the morning of another day. It was the first morning of June. What can surpass the splendor of the Sound ~~ashing~~ in the atmosphere of early summer! It was a

scene of peace and of pleasure. Near by was a fisher man singing in his boat. Just below, in motionless calm, arose a great schooner at anchor. It seemed to merge into the water around, both were so still. Eager little ripples ran up to kiss its immobile bow, sliding swiftly and softly back into silence. The busy steam-boat, puffing by in midwater, gave no token of haste as it neared its mooring wharf, while the great wave in its wake swelled on and on till it sank in peace at the bottom of the pier. A red pleasure-boat filled with gay girls went drifting by, and the air was glad with their laughter. A yacht, with all its white wings spread and a starry flag afloat, sped past, telling in itself its own story of beauty and pleasure and freedom. An armada of distant ships seemed merged in the horizon.

A little farther up the Sound a low line of hills were outlined against the sky, while above them, piles of cumulus clouds lifted their fleecy pinnacles into upper deeps of blue. Far-off islands gleamed through auras of shining mirage. Far-off hills wore veils of nebulae shot with opaline tints, while here and there a single blue wave reaching upward bore trembling for an instant upon its creamy crest the same iridescent hue. The Sound in one long, loitering wave broke upon the beach below, then as slowly swashed back into its bed, leaving the reach of green and golden-brown sea-weed, of pearly pebbles and pinky shells, all glowing and waiting for its next caress.

A white gull circled above the singing fisherman's head. A kingfisher, poised on the rock near by, peered with dilated eyes and vibrating plumage into the flood

beneath, full of eager and ecstatic life as he darted downward for his prey. In the little cove at the foot of the rock the light waves came murmuring in, with a stir of happiness, and the sparkling foam that broke upon its ledges seemed but the over-brimming, effervescing freshness of the delicious morning. An oriole sent down a note of triumph from the elm on the lawn. Agnes heard the doves stirring in their cotes, and one came and perched upon the pier, blinking its shy eyes and puffing out its lustrous breast with air, as if it could not take in enough. There was no purple mist in the atmosphere. It seemed a palpable body of luminous blue, infiltrated with sunshine. It was life-giving, intoxicating almost in its inundating brightness. Nature had mounted at once to her youth, and made life, love, beauty perfect again in the prodigal largess of her first June day.

Agnes sighed. As its sound stole on the rejoicing air it made her conscious that she alone gave out a dissonant note amid the consummate harmony surrounding her. In the abundant air, the overflowing sunshine, the all-pervading symphonies of the beautiful earth, what had she lost? "A believing, a happy heart," she inly said. God's fair world was just as fair: the flowing sea, the circling coast.

"Glory of the earth and air,
Do you miss what I have lost?"

she exclaimed, lifting her face upward.

"Mamma, dit me one of dem."

Vida wanted a jelly-fish. Eight years before, Agnes was child enough to sit where she now sat, watching

these translucent creatures by the hour. It was her children that watched and wanted them now. There they were, gleaming and trembling in the clear water at the foot of the pier, the most exquisite and most perishable of all created things. Two little heads were bobbing through the bars, and four eager eyes were peering downward at the sun-shot jewels afloat in the waves.

"I want un in my hand," said Vida.

"If mamma should put one in your hand it wouldn't be pretty any more," said Agnes. "If Vida could touch it, 'twould melt and go away. Wouldn't you rather see it in the bright water, so pretty, than all melting in your hand?"

"No," said Vida emphatically, "I want un in my hand."

"So did mamma once," said Agnes, "a long, long time ago;" and she looked with forecasting gaze upon this child, lifting up in miniature her father's beautiful, demanding face. "Put not your trust in — the love of man," said the voice within her. But let no mother of a child say that she cannot live without man's love, however else bereft. She who has projected and perpetuated her life in the being of another can never be alone. As she clasped the hand of each child, it seemed to her that she took another and a deeper hold upon life. Her life she seemed to see in their eyes.

"One for life — one for immortality," said the soul within her that she could not silence. Her face blanched as she listened.

Old Doctor Bache came stamping down the lawn to the pier. Agnes had sent him word of her arrival, and he came at once to see her and the children.

"Welcome home," he said with real fatherly emotion as he gave his hand to the young mother, and in the same breath arrested an instinctive shake of his head, lest she should see it, as his eyes fell upon the face of the boy.

"I can read in the Third Reader," said Cyril.

"The —— you can! You are not to read any more in it, I can tell you, sir. You are to stay out doors all the time the sun shines. I thought your mamma too wise a woman to shut you up to read, when she ought to have had you out, making a man of you."

"She didn't shut me up," said Cyril loyally. "I wanted to learn to read my own self. She took me and Vida to a big garden. It was full of trees ever so high. And I saw two rabbits. My mamma is goin' to buy *me* two rabbits. They are goin' to live in a green house. Colin is makin' me a snare to catch a water-rat."

"You'll do for the present," said the old doctor, delighted at any outburst of the primal boy in the delicate child.

"I couldn't help it, doctor," said Agnes. "I remembered what you said about his studying, but as I couldn't keep him from learning I thought it best to help him. Cyril, go with Vida and see if Colin has your snare done."

When the children were beyond hearing she said, "I think I know, doctor, how very delicate he is. I feel *sure* that he will die a child. He will never grow up."

"Pho! pho! You kept him too long in Washington. How could any child live in a Washington

boarding-house, — or grown creature either, long? I spent a week in one once, and it was nearly the death of me. You've come home none too soon, young woman, I should say, for your own health," he said with one of his sudden, searching glances. "I think worse than ever of that hole of malarial and political iniquity. You've the half-dead look everybody has that comes out of it after one of its wearing, tearing seasons. I'm afraid you've been too gay, been to too many all-night 'hops' and receptions. Come, tell me all about 'em."

He sat down under the canopy of the little pier and she told him, not about hops or receptions, but about many things which really interested him; about public buildings and public men. Without knowing it she made vivid pictures of places and of some of the most exciting scenes in that most fateful Congress. One she never mentioned. She praised her husband's powers, but was silent upon his politics.

"Doctor," she said, "men of mark, who really know, say that he has more than talent enough to become a leader in the House."

"Haven't a doubt of it," said the doctor.

Personal health and feeling were left behind in bright converse on topics of universal interest. Agnes' cheeks were flushed and her eyes aglow with her themes, when her good and wise friend arose to depart.

"Can't tell you how you've interested me. I can see more in one of your descriptions than I could in a newspaper in a month. Mind, plenty of air and sunshine, brown bread and cream, fruit fresh and ripe, and raw beefsteak scraped to a pulp, for that boy — and ditto for yourself. You need 'em all to cure you of

Washington, and to make you plump as partridges ; as for the girl, I believe she'd thrive on a door-nail ;" and with a ringing laugh the doctor departed. But his back was not more than fairly turned before a deep soberness covered his face, and as he strode past the confines of the village street he struck his stout cane into Lotusport soil with a vim which seemed a constant escape-valve to overcharged feeling.

"There is no help for it, none," he said aloud. "I shall see the end, whatever it be. Talent ! yes. So has the devil — plenty of talent, and too much. If *he* had, as well, truth, honor, decency, his talent would amount to something beside mischief. He hasn't an atom of either. She tries to deceive herself, but she is not deceived. Well, I did make her forget her boy for a few minutes. Even that was a satisfaction. First by attacking herself, then the country. But that boy has got to go, I'm afraid, in spite of raw beefsteak. A clear case of *atrophia*. Washington has finished what nature began. Too much nerve, too much brain for the body ; bad diet, bad air, malaria, all have had a snatch at it. It might be built up, it *would* be built up on my prescription, with a different brain and nervous system. With his, there's not an even chance ; far from it. He may live a year, he may die before fall. She is right, he cannot live to be a man, — of course not."

But it was scarcely gloomy, the boy's slow fading away. Through it Agnes became familiarized with dying in its gentlest guise. She had learned to feel that life held nothing, even for her boy, so sweet as rest. He was all a boy in his delight in snares, in his desire for a gun, in his longing for a bear, a good little

bear who would play with him and live with his rabbits, in his proneness to "train" and to beat a drum in martial array, while his little sister marched behind as "a private," and in his capacity to build and to man a mud fort, under the generalship of the warlike Colin. But every boyish delight was overtaken by the inevitable weariness. Howsoever gladly the day began, with boyish shouts and laughter in the sunny air, it ended by his mother's side in the fine, incessant, exasperating cough, in the weakening chill and slow, low fever.

The special nature of his disease was the impossibility of tracing it to any one known cause, its subtle and evasive symptoms, its extreme difficulty of cure. There were days when it seemed as if he could never be so ill again, so resolute and so enthusiastic he seemed in his out-door sports; yet another morning would find him lower than he ever was before — followed by other days and nights of the same alternate brightness and languor.

Through every fluctuation his mother seemed to see the final end, to see it just the same even when she deluded herself to hope. When she lost her other child, to bury him seemed to her life's direst ill. She knew now that life held sorrows deeper than death, pangs harder to be borne. With her heart reft in anguish at the very thought of his dying, she would still say steadfastly that she would choose that he should go, rather than stay to outlive his mother's kiss, to forsake her love for the evil in the world. Her way might be long and lonely without him, but it would be so much to know that her lamb was safe, — safe from sorrow, safe from sin, safe forever.

Living in and for her boy, hour by hour, she thought less of herself and of his father. Still, when she heard him happy on the lawn, or held him in her arms, or watched him while he slept, the thought would come of that father. Sometimes he would stand before her contemptuous, cruel, as he stood that last morning ; sometimes he would come to her in her dreams, the god-like lover of her girlhood. Often, in spite of herself, amid her work, her study, her child-care, the question would thrust itself in, "Where *is* he? Amid his brilliant, tumultuous career does he never think of me, his wife, with early-time tenderness? Does he never miss me, never want me as I do him? And where is *she*? Does she haunt his path still? *Did* she go? Is she there with him, and I here alone? Does she thrust herself athwart his path now, as she has from the beginning? The world — no, not *all* the world is wide enough for her and for me. I want a just God to avenge my wrong, to give me back that which is mine."

Cyril King had no true realization of the condition of his child. He knew that he was ailing, and also that more or less he had been ailing ever since he was born. The very character of the boy's disease made it impossible for such a father to think that he was in any way seriously sick. He would see him, after a night of suffering, playing about the next day, and the result was that from the beginning he thought Agnes was inclined to greatly exaggerate her boy's illness. She knew this. She knew that if she wrote to his father what she believed to be the true condition of their child, he would only blame her for telling her troubles

and her unnecessary fears to one so oppressed and overburdened with public cares as himself. Thus, beyond the statement that he was not as strong or as free from the physical difficulties which weakened him when he left Washington, she said nothing of the boy. Her fears, her prayers for her child, were withheld from mortal ear and poured into the silence of the Infinite Heart that is Love.

June faded from the world all bloom and brightness till its last rose perished. July held the capital in its blazing zone, and still the congressional session lasted. Agnes had not seen her husband since the morning when he allowed her to kiss him farewell in the railway car at Washington. One day she received two letters. The first was from Cyril. It read:—

DEAR AGNES, — I am using the little that the heat has left of me, to tell you how sorry I am that the accumulated pressure of public business (which I cannot evade) has allowed me no chance to come home to visit you and the children, as I intended. With my committees and the congressional sessions now held night as well as day, I have not a moment that I call my own. The heat has become intolerable, and we are now pushing bills at a tremendous rate, and cutting down debate to the briefest possible limit, in order to hasten the day of final adjournment. It must come very soon; when I shall hasten to the cool airs of Lotusmere without delay.

Truly your husband,

CYRIL KING.

P. S. Though you do not say so, I infer from the

tone of your letter that you are still anxious about Cyr. Agnes, will you never cease borrowing trouble about that child? The sooner you realize, and act accordingly, that he must fight his way, as all boys do, through the whole army of childish diseases, the better it will be for him, for you, and certainly for your husband. He has worms, no doubt; give him "Vermifuge."

C. K.

The second letter was from Mrs. Peppercorn. It was written on paper stiff as buckram, with a crest in heraldry of a griffin in blue, with a forked red tongue, holding a suspended pellet. The letter was dated —

LAFAYETTE SQUARE, WASHINGTON, D. C., }
July 1, 18 —.

MY DEAR MRS. KING, — I never minded my own business but once in my life, and I have been sorry for it ever since. Then, it was when I saw a designing minx come into the family of an absent wife, and steal at first the attentions, and then the affections, of the husband. The absent wife was my friend, and I failed to do my duty to her through a fear for once to make her business my business. The result was, my friend went heart-broken to an untimely grave. As I remarked, I have not forgiven myself for minding my own business that time. *You* I cannot really claim, I presume, as more than an acquaintance. But I have been very much interested in you, my dear, ever since I saw so much of you at the ambassadors' ball. I write as your true friend, to warn you that if you do not look more closely after your husband, there is fear

ful trouble ahead for you, and disgrace for him, if a man *can* be disgraced by his own follies, in the eyes of a silly world that finds it so pleasant to strain at a gnat and to swallow a cable — if it likes it.

Let me ask you, my dear, what in reason, or decency, is that Mrs. Sutherland doing here now? The season over, the thermometer at one hundred and seven in the shade, and she without a residence, “visiting!” “visiting,” she says, Madame S——; I say visiting your husband. Don’t go and break your heart about it. In my opinion there is not a man on earth worth a woman’s broken heart, though I think well of my husband, — but, my dear, it is because I have always taken care of him, and managed him, yes, managed him, as every man has to be managed if you keep him. You must put down your foot, and hold up your head, and declare to Mr. King that you will have nothing of the kind, — nothing of the kind like his driving every evening of the week in an open barouche with a woman as uncertain (to say the least) as that Mrs. Sutherland; that you will not endure it to have him dancing attendance everywhere on her, while you are shut up at home alone with the children.

My dear, you should not have gone away and left your husband to himself or to her. My advice to you is to come back straight, if it is as hot here as Tophet. There is no antidote to a man’s nonsense so effectual as the sight of his wife. We would leave for the White Sulphur, — Lulie and I, — but I will not leave Mr. Peppercorn alone, not I. Now take my advice and **come straight to the house of**

Your faithful friend,

CASSANDRA PEPPERCORN.

P. S. You remember, don't you, that young sprout all the girls of the West End went wild over last winter, Altonious Algernon Aubrey? They all called him the very pink and prince of the dancing gentlemen. Such aristocratic airs and graces as he took on! He sniffed at the "mob," he disdained to speak to a clerk! He was an amateur in all elegant arts, a translator, everything that was "nobby" and "swell," as that set say. Every one of the seven Highflyers was dying for him. And now he's gone, they've just discovered that his mother keeps an apple stand, and with apples she paid his way through college. Fancy the plight of the Highflyers! and the quaking of their genealogical tree, that struck root before the Flood!

Again your friend,

C. P.

N. B. My dear, *come at once.* They have just driven past again. I could beat them both — her especially.

Your devoted friend,

C. PEPPERCORN.

CHAPTER XXII.

LOSS : FLIGHT.

"Oh, the stillness of the room
Where the children used to play!
Oh, the silence of the house,
Since the children went away!
This is the mother-life —
'To bear, to love, to lose,'
Till all the sweet, sad tale is told
In a pair of little shoes,
In a single broken toy,
In a flower pressed, to keep
All fragrant still the faded life
Of one who fell asleep."

THUS Agnes wrote, out of the hush of her home and the loss of her heart, in a little manuscript book hidden in the inner drawer of her desk, which she thought no human eyes had ever seen save her own. She was mistaken. Linda had seen it, and knew every line that it contained.

Every mother who has buried a child knows what that "stillness" is—that silence that follows after a sweet voice hushed, a beloved step grown forever still.

The rabbits still lived in their green house on the lawn, but little Vida fed them alone, pausing often, while she did it, to call upon the name of her brother

in impassioned tones of childish sorrow. Since her first step she had been his inseparable companion, and now she seemed lost and most unhappy without her life-long playfellow.

There was a new shrine at Lotusmere. Into a little room at the head of the staircase Agnes had gathered everything that belonged to her boy. Here was his "trainer's" hat with its bright cockade, his silent drum, his box of tools, his books, his first boots. His mother with her own hands had folded and laid in the drawer of his little bureau every garment left of all that he had ever worn, from the dainty white frock made by her own hands before he was born, to the last new "sailor's suit," with its broad collar and bright buttons, that he lived to wear but once. It was with no morbid emotion that she shut herself in this room by the hour, communing with her child and with her own soul. A part of herself had passed into the impalpable; no less it seemed a part of her conscious existence; she could never be sundered from it. Her child could never be the less her child, — less living, less beloved. All others might outlive him, forget him, but not his mother. The mother-heart could never cease to miss the first-born fruit of its love and of its youth. He was not more her child than her daughter; but it seemed to her always that his mother must make up to him in tenderness for what the daughter had, and he had not, — his father's sympathy and pride.

When Cyril King looked upon the dead body of his boy, a keen pang of remorse shot through the natural sorrow that he felt for his loss. A thousand pleading looks and shy entreating words, but dimly noted and

wholly unheeded, when they spoke to him from the eyes and lips of the living boy, now that the boy was dead, rose up to haunt him. He had never been proud of his son. All a boy in his predilections and habits, he nevertheless had his mother's organization. "A temperament well enough for a girl," his father would say, "but Vida is *my* boy. *She* ought to have been the boy." A reproduction of his mother in face and spirit, as that mother grew to be more and more a reproach to his father the boy became scarcely less so. Unconsciously, she was always trying to make up to him for the love and sympathy withheld by his father. Thus in a double sense she yielded up her life of life with him in death.

Yet the Lotusport mind concluded that "Mrs. King did not take the death of her boy very hard. *I* call such resignation unnatural," said Mrs. Prang, to whom it was meat and drink to attend a funeral and "go to the grave," especially the latter. It yielded her the double delight of taking a ride at somebody else's expense, and of taking an estimate of the exact degree of grief felt and exhibited by each "mourner."

"*I* call such resignation unnatural — in a mother!" she said; "not a scrap of mournin' on, not even at the grave; not a sob, — not one! Poor Mr. King was just broken all to pieces. *He* has a heart. She just stood as white and as cold as if she was cut out of marble. *I* do and *I* will call such composure unnatural and unfeelin'. Of all the funerals *I* ever attended — and *I* do believe *I*'ve attended thousands — never did *I* witness a parent bury a child with such willin'ness as Mrs. King. Don't tell me there ain't somethin' lackin' in that woman."

Could Mrs. Prang have listened at the keyhole of the little room, her heart would have been gladdened by more than one sob, deep and low, breaking from that "resigned" mother's heart. Could she have pried into the inner pocket of that mother's work-basket she would have taken from it a bit of newspaper, worn with reading and blurred with tears, which bore these lines, that had welled out from another mother's heart:—

"I wonder so that mothers ever fret
At little children clinging to their gown;
Or that the footprints, when the day is wet,
Are ever black enough to make them frown
If I could find a little muddy boot,
Or cap, or jacket, on my chamber floor;
If I could kiss a rosy, restless foot,
And hear its patter in my home once more;
If I could mend a broken cart to-day,
To-morrow make a kite to reach the sky,
There is no woman in God's world could say
She was more blissfully content than I.
But ah! his dainty pillow next my own
Is never rumpled by his shining head;
My singing birdling from his nest has flown, —
The little boy I used to kiss is dead."

"And yet, and yet, my darling, I would not bring you back if I could — not to suffer as you must have suffered in the body, in this world."

Mother-love uttered these words, and yet no less mother-love, in its inward wound, bled with loss and longing, never to be healed till reunited to the life it had lost.

Agnes did not accept Mrs. Peppercorn's invitation, nor follow her advice. Whereupon that honorable lady

in time came to regard Mrs. King as a very weak-spirited person, utterly deficient in "backbone" and in a desire to cultivate one, and so far useless as a victim whose battles the combative lady was eager to fight. She never, however, withdrew the light of her countenance from her so far as to neglect to denounce "that Mrs. Sutherland" and the Hon. Cyril King, in both private and public places. To Cyril's astonishment he discovered one day that he had an active enemy, and his absent wife an active champion in high places, in the powerful person of Hon. Mrs. Peppercorn. This unlooked-for and late-learned knowledge was not without its outward effect. It gave the significance of consciousness to acts before often the result of mere carelessness in the actors. It made their association less public and more personal in its nature. Thus Mrs. Peppercorn, with the best of intentions, did more harm than good by interfering, as so often happens in this world. Her letter did not fail of inflicting its inevitable pain upon Agnes. It gave the form and substance of reality to what before had been doubt and fear in her mind, and a voiceless sorrow in her heart. But had the most that it suggested been true, it could not have impelled Agnes to appear as the accuser of her husband in the house of a stranger. Her inmost soul recoiled from uncovering her heart's wound to the eyes of the world. Besides, she waited, praying, hoping still that the glamour would pass. He might falter, stray even in outward seeming for a season, but she only could ever be his wife; it was bitter, the draught she was drinking now, but it would pass; he would come back to his allegiance, to his wife, to his home.

She wrote to Mrs. Peppercorn, thanking her for her interest and intended kindness ; but not acknowledging by a word that such kindness was needed. It was very hard for Mr. King to be alone, so overworked, etc. How could he survive in Washington at all, at such a season, without drives and fresh air ? Mrs. Sutherland was very kind, and had invited his wife and children to drive as well as Mr. King, etc.

"Idiot!" was Mrs. Peppercorn's only ejaculation as she concluded the letter, and in the next breath tore it to atoms. "Idiot! but I have done *my* duty. She will rue the day she refused to make that man walk in the way he should go."

In the first pain of reading Mrs. Peppercorn's epistle, Agnes resolved to show it to Cyril on his return. But the more rapid decline of her boy made all else secondary in her thought and heart. In the autumn she did not return to the capital for the short session of Congress. The condition of her child made it impossible, had Cyril desired it. He did not desire it. The first winter had imparted an important fact to his knowledge : that the Hon. Cyril King at a fashionable hotel would be a more important person in society than the same gentleman immured amid the smells of an obscure side-street boarding-house. The lodging and boarding of an entire family with servants at such a hotel was not in accordance with his finances, or with Washington prices. But it was in perfect consonance with his income that he himself should live at such an house while his family stayed at Lotusmere. Thus another gay season rushed on to the penitential door of Lent, and no man in public life was seen

oftener at all the resorts of fashion than the Hon. Cyril King.

Mrs. King, who had failed to make a wide-spread impression upon the attention of society, was not greatly missed. For the personal friends who remembered and inquired for her, Cyril had ever ready the reply that he made to Mrs. Peppercorn when, in a crowded drawing-room where he stood for the moment wedged to the wall with Circe Sutherland on his arm, the uncompromising woman bore down upon him with the question, "How is your wife, Mr. King? I am sorry to see you here without her."

"I share your sorrow, madam," he replied, with serene nonchalance, "but by the advice of our family physician Mrs. King remains at home this season with our invalid boy. Washington air was a great injury to him last winter."

Almost anywhere that the gay world met, the popular young member was seen. It was seen also that he escorted the beautiful Mrs. Sutherland less frequently than he did the winter before, when Mrs. King was in Washington. He danced with her occasionally, he escorted her to opera sometimes, — but he was seen oftener with other ladies, as was she also with other gentlemen.

"There! you see it was only the idlest gossip, coupling the names of those two together as they were last spring," said Mrs. Midget to her friend Mrs. Peppercorn.

"I see no such thing," answered that astute judge of manners and morals. "I formed my opinion on what I *saw* with my own eyes; and I've not changed

it one iota. They're *more* to each other than they were last winter; that's why they think more of appearances and try to shy off remarks by going more with other people. Mark my words, Mrs. Midget, there is trouble ahead in that quarter."

Mrs. Peppercorn did not stint her words at any time or place. They found their way to Cyril King through more than one source. Agnes had a friend at court who, for aught he knew, reported his doings and seemings to her every day. Thus his letters grew silent on the time and strength consuming committee, and veered off on another tack.

"You remember," he wrote, "little Dilly Driver, the artist-lobbyist, don't you? But I know you will be astonished to hear that she has secured the last twenty thousand dollar appropriation, and is to paint the next historical picture for the Capitol. You know she hadn't the ghost of a chance when you went away. Apparently, she had not a ghost of one a week ago. The Thunderer is dead against her in the Senate. Nugent, we thought, had killed her in the House. He has been six months at work on the final speech that was to annihilate her utterly. On the very day that he was to have made it, her bill passed, and she won the congressional commission against a dozen men competitors. You never saw a man so mad as Nugent (he is the chairman of the appropriation committee); his six months' speech, all his work and worry gone for naught, and the little fox with the commission in her pocket, in spite of him and half of Congress. It's the more maddening because if he hadn't been *sick* it could not have happened. You see, while he was *shut*

up at home the little cormorant was busy from morning till night in the lobbies, calling out members, button-holing senators, smiling at them, crying at them, shaking her ringlets at them, pleading with brown eyes full of tears, 'I'm a wee bit of a woman, a poor persecuted little girl, from whom a dozen great big men want to take away the chance of making a picture for government pay, because they want the fame and money themselves. *Give me your vote?*' What could the fellows do but give it — I, among the rest? Vaughn managed the bill. Half a dozen of the men who would not listen to her, who declared that she couldn't make a picture fit for the Capitol, and that it was a wrong to the country to let her try, were either away or at home sick, when up jumped Vaughn with the bill — and carried it. They were taking the vote, when in came Nugent, just up from a sick-bed, with his speech in his hand, determined to deliver it at the last moment, and if he was to be carried back to his bed after making it. Before he reached his seat he called out, 'I object!' It was of no use. The bill had passed. Dilly Driver had the commission, — the twenty thousand dollars. And the Capitol is to have another daub to descend to posterity. Think of Nugent tugging away for six months on that speech, just for nothing! Everybody is wondering *how* Dilly Driver, who has neither training, experience, reputation, nor genius as an artist, and is a woman, got the commission. I've told you how.

"I hope Cyr. is growing stronger, and that you and Vida and Linda are well.

"Always affectionately,

CYRIL."

He filled the winter with breezy letters to Agnes full of impersonal gossip and news, but at the end of the session she knew nothing of what his own personal life had been. Her reply to Mrs. Peppercorn had not encouraged that lady to proffer any more gratuitous information. Even in his letters Cyril spoke to her out of another world; so remote it seemed to the one in which she lived and had her being. Every day, beside the couch of her boy, her own life grew more silent and inward. Now she sat in the awful hush which follows death. It was June again. Once more the oriole sang on the lawn; the kingfisher peered from his old perch on the rock; the doves basked in the sun; the fisherman sang in his boat; the great ships sailed by; the Sound spread forth to ear and eye all the eager activity of its multiform life. But beside a little grave, new made, just beyond the reach of its embracing waves, the mother's heart beat dumb to the voiceful energy without, as in inward musing she followed after that part of herself which had already passed into the unseen and the eternal. Cyril King, holding the arm of his wife within his, as he with her looked down upon the dead face of their first-born in his coffin, felt his heart stir with love and fidelity to her, the mother of that child, under all the rubbish of the world that lay upon its surface. In that heart-throb propelled by death, in one instant's flash he saw himself as he was. All should be different. He would annul the later sinful days. He would go back to the sinless years, and begin again to live. Alas! man giveth himself to sin through the weakness of his will and the strength of his desire. This need not have been true earlier.

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But it was not for such as he to clear his beclouded conscience of folly and passion, the accumulation of years, at a single sweep. His better nature was buried too deep beneath the world's *débris* for that. Little Cyril was buried in early May, and by early June his father, to all appearances, was as perpetually absorbed in the practice of his profession as he had been before he entered Congress. His life was lived in the city. Sometimes, in his devotion to a single "important suit," a week would pass without his appearing at Lotusmere at all. But when this happened he did not forget to brighten the interval with cheery notes and baskets of fruit sent to his wife.

One morning in early August Agnes received a note from him, saying, —

"Put on your prettiest, Aggie; throw open the house and fill it with flowers as only you can, for I shall bring up a few friends this evening to tea, and after, we will have an impromptu *musicale*. Two of the ladies you know, Mrs. Sutherland and her Aunt Jessie. They will return in the eleven o'clock train. Shall come at six. In great haste, CYRIL."

She had not seen him for days. Speaking to her from his distant outer world, his words made a strange vibration in her still, inner life. They smote upon her heart and struck from it a throb of the old anguish which wrung it as a wife before death came. "How dare she come here!" said the passionate heart. "She has not forgotten what I said to her. She knows that all I ask, all I beg of her, is to leave me and mine alone. She knows that I have buried my boy — that I see no company — yet she comes."

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She read the note over again. "I will try to be reasonable," she said; "of course it is because he invites her that she comes; surely she would not come, she would not dare to come, not to his home, to his wife, if she were not trying to do as I asked her. Perhaps because she is trying she comes where I am. I will try not to judge her harshly. I will do my duty. I will do as my husband asks me. I will make his home bright for his friends."

There could have been no home picture fairer in its outward seeming than that which greeted Cyril King and his guests as they passed through the gate of Lotusmere that evening. The low sun sent long lance-like rays quivering across trees and shrubs and flowers to the wide verandah, in whose open door stood Agnes dressed in white, with her bright-haired little daughter by her side, wearing the same spotless attire. The level sun-rays made a glinting nimbus about these white-robed figures, set amid emerald vines and clustering blossoms. Vida danced with joy at the sight of her father, and ran dancing down the avenue to meet him. Agnes came forward with a smile of greeting upon her face.

"Dear Mrs. King! I haven't seen you since we drove together in Washington, a year ago last spring," exclaimed Circe Sutherland, advancing before the others and going up to Agnes with a proffered kiss. "So long! and such sad things have happened to you," she said in the softest voice. "You couldn't come to me, so I have come to you," in tones of tenderest sympathy.

"Thank you," replied Agnes, in kindred tone, as she came forward to greet her other guests. Her mother-

heart, thus reminded of her lost child, was no proof against that voice.

In the parlor waited Linda, wearing deepest mourning. Nothing narrower than quarter of a yard folds of crape could express her grief or measure her loss. The tea-table, garnished with flowers and set with delicate viands, was all that even Circe Sutherland could desire. She overflowed with the subtlest and sweetest appreciation of everything. She heard nothing, she saw nothing, she tasted nothing that did not delight her, and she expressed her delight in voice and speech of equal music.

Certainly the drawing-room of Lotusmere never thrilled to such melody before, as flowed from her voice and from the touch of her fingers. Agnes' piano had found a new interpreter. Agnes herself, with all the soul of music in her, though it had never found its utmost expression through the organ of her voice, listened for the time entranced. She shrank with fright, when, rising from the piano, Mrs. Sutherland said, —

“Do play one of your old ballads for us, Mrs. King. Your husband says that you play and sing them both so sweetly.”

“I would if I could. It would be impossible now I can imagine no music after yours, Mrs. Sutherland.”

“Thanks. How kind you are. And how glad I am to give *you* pleasure.”

Cyril looked delighted with Agnes' words of appreciation, but he did not urge her to sing. She was thankful that he did not, and yet something in her heart made her want him to ask her. He did not, and as the evening went on she became more and more con-

scious that she was not in his thoughts. When he first arrived with his guests his thoughts were on appearances, and he was quite sufficiently attentive to his wife to fulfill the rôle of the proper husband. Now, as the beguiling voice floated through his home and filled all his senses, he yielded unconsciously to wonted habits; he was pervaded by the singer. He hovered near her, he turned her music. Polite to all, in his manner to her there was a consciousness, a difference, which others felt rather than saw. The dreadful sensation which struck through her heart at the ambassadors' ball (the only place where she had seen them together) again filled the breast of Agnes, — the same sense of neglect, of aloneness. Now it came from the fact which made itself felt rather than seen. She sat the acknowledged mistress in her own parlor. As such her husband had shown her all deference. He was just for the present altogether absorbed in a beautiful musician. Yet the something more made itself felt even to the uninitiated.

"Mr. King has eyes and ears but for one," whispered low a lady in the background. "Nothing could be plainer."

"At least to Mrs. King," murmured back her companion. "How sorry I am I'm not married," she whispered sarcastically.

Nevertheless it was a "perfectly delightful evening." Each guest proclaimed it to be such, when about half past ten began the stir of departure. "Mrs. King, I have had *such* a charming time." "Mrs. King, we are so much indebted for a delightful evening," said each guest on his or her way to dressing-room or hat-rack.

"Good night, Aggie; I shall be home to-morrow by tea-time," said Cyril, slipping into the parlor, hat in hand, while all his guests were out in pursuit of hats and wrappings.

"You are not going back to the city to-night, Cyril?" asked Agnes, with a face as white as her dress.

"I must, Agnes, in common politeness. Mrs. Sutherland and her aunt have no escort, while the other ladies have. It will be midnight when they reach the city. They must not go alone from the station even to their own carriage. I invited them, and I *must* see them safely home. Did you ever hear such a voice before?"

"No, never."

"I shall be at home to-morrow, to tea. Good night, Aggie."

"Good night."

He stooped and kissed her.

Why, as he lifted his face, did he pause and look upon hers again, as if he were taking it into his mind to carry away with him? He certainly knew not why he did it. The hall resounded with the ejaculations, the laughter, the merriment, which always accompanies the breaking up of an informal social party. Agnes forced herself to the door, forced her mouth to smile, if her eyes refused, forced her lips to utter words of pleasant farewell.

"I don't intend that hospitality shall always remain on one side," said Mrs. Sutherland, as she lifted her face from kissing two unreturning lips. "The very first visit you make must be to *me*. Must it not, Mr

King? You must come and stay with me a whole week. What music we will have! And we will go everywhere. Say you will come soon; *do*, that's a darling. Can't you make her say that she will, Mr. King?" with a pretty parting pout.

"No. I never yet made her say anything that she did not choose to say. You are a stubborn little woman, aren't you, Aggie? But of course she will very soon visit you with me, Mrs. Sutherland."

"I shall *never* visit Mrs. Sutherland," said Agnes in the open door.

This sentence, uttered with startling distinctness, fell like a bomb amid the little group standing before her on the piazza. Till she uttered it, her manner had been that of a faultless hostess. In one breath she undid all that she had suffered so much to do through the entire evening. They had borne upon her too long. By one request Circe Sutherland over-played her part. It was the one thing that Agnes could not bear. The truth outraged within her arose, and in defiance of all conventionality said its one say. No soft society word came in response to such impolitic sincerity.

"Good night," said the party simultaneously, turned, and left. Agnes, standing in the door alone, watched them out of sight beyond the garden avenue, then, without a word, ascended to her own room, in which Vida waited asleep in her crib. No sleep touched with healing her young mother's lids that night. She arose as she lay down, with open, tearless eyes. She made no response to Linda's hints, which insinuated plainly enough that she was conscious of all that transpired the evening before. The house still seemed full of the

voice that filled it with music the night before. She wanted to get away from it, and for the first time since her boy's death went out to her old seat on the pier. The salt breeze blew refreshingly over her hot eyelids and cheeks. She looked away over the gleaming plain of waters to the far, low-lying hills, to the distant ships moving out to the ocean, as if she were never to follow them again. Her eyes came back from their outward journey, and with the same brooding farewell light rested on every familiar object that helped to make dear her home : the flowers that she had tended, the elm that shaded the lawn, the little graves that had grown green in its shadow.

"Cyril coming home to tea ! He promised *that* before I spoke. He will not come now. If he did, he would not speak to me. He will never forgive me, never. What is it in me that *will* speak out when everything seems false and hollow about me ? I couldn't help it. I didn't want to speak, and yet I did, and he will never forgive me. Cyril was never so far from me as he is at this moment. I feel as if I might never see him again. Yet he is coming home to tea."

Vida had flitted back and forth about her mother, like a butterfly, all day. It was hours past noon, when Agnes took the chubby little hand in hers, and went back with her to the house ; then Vida went in pursuit of her "Auntie Linda," and Agnes again entered into the refuge of her own room. As she went in, she saw what seemed to be an open note on her bureau. She went to it, and found it to be a letter without an envelope, in Cyril's hand. She opened it. It began, 'My only Love.' Had he by some means placed this

here to reassure and comfort her aching, loving, and desolate heart? How it fluttered in her breast! It seemed as if it would stop beating with sudden joy, as she read, "My only Love: Life is valueless without you. Why should I struggle any longer against a fate that I cannot arrest! God knows that I do not want to love you. But because you live I have no power to help it. My fate is in your hands. You remind me of my fame, my family, of all I have at stake. You command me to forget you. You know that is impossible. I can part with fame, family, everything but you. I will not be separated from you. I cannot be. If you want to save me from ruin, come back where, at least in the distance, I can see your lovely face, — where, at least amid the crowd, I can listen to your voice. It is too late to tell me of *her*; that it is for *her* sake that you went away. It is for *my* sake that you must come back! If I were never to see your face again, and to know that it was she who had banished you, I should hate her, — hate the sight of her. Only by coming back can you make me tolerate the thought of her. Only by so doing can you help her. You cannot make her more than she is, or more than she is to me. No one knows this better than you. Then, Circe, why do you torture me? Will you drive me to ruin, or will you come where I am, where I may see you, — and live?"

Agnes looked at the date. It bore that of June, of the year before; a month before Mrs. Peppercorn wrote her. As she opened the letter, another dropped out, written on tinted paper, and in the most delicate hand. It began, "My Fate, I can but obey your command

Your life cannot be poorer than mine, robbed as it is of the light of your eyes."

Agnes read no more, till she came to the signature, "Circe." She walked slowly to her desk, opened it, sat down; again opened the two letters, and read every word of each, from beginning to end. She then laid one in the other, and without an added word, placed both in one envelope, and directed it to her husband at his city office. She wrote another brief letter, directed it, placed both in her pocket, arose, put on her bonnet, and a moment later, Linda, looking out of her window with Vida by her side, said, "Look, baby! there goes your mamma. Where does baby think she is going?"

"Dun know. Baby wants to go wid mamma."

"Oh no! baby wants to stay with Auntie Linda."

"No s'e don't," with an emphatic scream, and a rush for her battered little garden hat.

"But baby *will* stay with auntie," said Linda, taking her into her arms with a wicked gleam in her eyes.

Agnes dropped both letters into the near post-office box, and then with slow but steady steps, that she might attract no attention, passed down the village street to what was called "The Front," from whence numerous dusty and mouldy piers jugged out into the water, with every variety of water-craft hugging their sides. She did not glance at any till she came to one beside which lay a staunch schooner, that moment receiving into its hold the load of fragrant lumber which was to be its next load of merchandise to Boston. It was trig and new, and bore upon its bow and stern, in golden letters, the name of "Agnes." She knew her

way down, for she had been here more than once before, with little Cyril.

"Is Captain Ben aboard?" she asked softly, of "a hand" who paused an instant in taking in the lumber and lifted his cap to a lady whom he knew.

"Yes, he is," said the man. "I will go and tell him who wants to see him." And as he passed her and caught the look in her eyes, he said inly, "They are full of trouble. No trouble should come anigh that lovely lady if I could help it. She as has so feelin' a heart for the poor. This very vessel a-named for her because on it."

Captain Ben came up from his cabin to meet her. To him, no woman on earth had so angelic a face as hers. When he was "Skipper Ben" and so poor, did she not come to his Mary when their baby died, take the stricken mother into her loving arms, and from that day to this, had she not been her tender, unchanging friend?

"Captain Ben, may I speak to you a moment below?" she asked.

"A moment or an hour, Mrs. King, as long as you please." And he led the way to his cabin.

"Captain Ben, I know that you are my friend," she said, with trembling voice. "Because I know that I can trust you, I come to you in my trouble. When you start to-night, I want you to take me and my little girl with you to Boston. If necessary, I want you to hide us out of sight. I want you to keep any human being from getting us before you sail. Will you, Captain Ben?"

"I'll do anything you ask me to do, Mrs. King. I'll hide you and defend you with my life, if necessary."

"I believe you, but it will not be necessary. Nobody will take the trouble to come after me," she said mournfully. "I was foolish to have thought of such a thing. When do you start?"

"Well, we should have started at sunset. But I will wait for you. When will you be likely to come?"

"Not till dark. I can't. Will you be on the lookout for me, Captain Ben?"

"I will come for you if you say so, Mrs. King, and will carry your little girl. And I will run down to the house for Mary. She often takes the trip. It will be pleasanter for you, Mrs. King, to have a woman on board, and she will look after the little girl."

"You are too good, Captain Ben. I shall never forget your kindness, never!"

Captain Ben was a gentleman; he had not asked her a question. He stood watching her as her form receded from the pier, and as he turned to start on his errand to his wife, he sighed.

"It's come," he said to himself. "I always knew that it would sometime. I only wonder it hasn't afore. Tortured to distraction, that's what she is; and she's goin', and I'll help her go. And I'll defend her with my last breath if she needs it. I'm dead agin him, the peacock, and always was."

Agnes went back to her home as quietly as she left it.

If Cyril came home to tea, she would meet him as if nothing had happened, and her departure would be delayed. "But he will not come to tea, I am sure of 't," she said.

She went to her own room, opened her desk, took from its inner drawer her little manuscript book, the

picture of Cyril, that he had given her before their marriage, and placed both in a reticule which she could carry upon her arm. She went into the room which she had made a shrine to her departed child, shut the door, and sat down in the low chair in which she had spent so many hours since his passing away. She kneeled down by it and begged God's mercy for herself, and for those whom she left. She went to the bureau, in which she had garnered the toys and garments of her boy. Here, for the first time, her heart's anguish swelled into tears. These were the treasures which it tore her heart to leave behind. Who would keep them always for his sake! Who but his mother? The reticule would hold so little of what once was a part of himself. She chose at last a single thing,—a tiny cap of lace, the first that he had ever worn, whose delicate embroideries her own hand had wrought, before he was born. This, with his picture, and one shining tress of his hair, was all that she could carry away of her child. Again she sat down in the low chair, and here, taking in every object in one long, lingering, loving gaze, she bade farewell forever to her home.

Cyril did not come. The two women and the little girl sat at the tea-table as usual. Save a deeper pallor on her face, no one could have detected anything marked, either in Agnes' aspect or manner.

Not till she took Vida at her early bed-time hour into her own room, did her face and movements betray excitement. Then it could be seen only in the quick breath and trembling hands.

It was but usual that she should take off the little girl's white embroidered frock, with its shoulder knot

of violet ribbon; but entirely unusual that instead of her night-gown, she should put on the rosy, round little figure a flannel petticoat, and a warm merino frock.

"What 'oo doin'?" inquired Vida wonderingly.

"I'm dressing Vida to go and take a walk with mamma; don't she want to go?"

"In de dark?"

"Out under the bright stars. Vida will have hold of mamma's hand, and won't be afraid?"

"*No!*" said Vida bravely.

The stout little legs were soon encased in woollen stockings and thick boots by the trembling hands, whereupon legs and feet began to dance with delight.

"Hush! Vida. If you want to go and walk with mamma under the stars you must be very quiet, so Auntie Linda will not hear you; for she would not want Vida to go."

Vida remembered what Auntie Linda said in the window in the afternoon, and grew whist. She appreciated the difficulty of getting off without that lady's interference, and was not without her childish longing for victory.

"Remember, now, Vida must not speak a word, or make a sound, and mamma will carry her out," said Agnes, taking the child in her arms before opening the door.

Vida was dumb. She was delighted with the mystery; it was much pleasanter than going to bed.

Out on the lawn, Agnes set the child down, and took the little hand in hers. She led her down the broad walk toward the pier, till coming near it they turned into a side path, and there, out of sight of the house,

beneath the great elm, beside the shining waves, the mother sat down by the graves of her children, while she drew her one living child close to her heart.

"Say good night to brother," she murmured with broken voice.

"Dood night, dood night, little brudder," said Vida with a sob.

Agnes stooped low. She laid her cheek upon the turf of each little grave, as if it were the face of the child at rest beneath. She broke off a white daisy blooming on little Cyril's grave, and shut it in the reticule on her arm. She bent down and kissed the turf green above his face.

"My boy!"

She took Vida's hand and moved slowly on toward an unfrequented path running along the Sound.

The distance was not long to the wharf. Before she had reached it two figures advanced toward her. They were Captain Ben and his wife.

"Mary, is this you! How good of you!" as the eager hand of her friend seized hers in loving clasp. Captain Ben took Vida in his arms. His wife did not loosen her grasp. Thus between two true hearts Agnes was led on to the vessel that through the darkness of the night was to bear her from her home.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE REFUGE.

AND this was the end? Apparently, her life had held more varied objects of interest than usually occupy the thought of a domestic woman. She loved her country with a deep personal patriotism. She loved knowledge for its own sake. She loved books, pictures, flowers, children. She loved great Nature through her every mood and manifestation, with a poet's fervor. She loved all pure and true ideals, and all her life of aspiration and effort reached only after them to make them her own, to reëmbody and revitalize them in her own individual being. Yet these broad and varied tributaries of life had all flowed inward to one concentrated centre of interest, which seemed to take in and to absorb every other — a single man, her husband.

She had tried to educate herself through every phase of her being, that she might be able to meet the utmost demand of his Protean nature. He demanded so much, he needed so much, in order to be content. Early she saw in how many opposite directions she must pursue culture if she were not to seem lacking to Cyril. She knew that he must find in her embodied the gifts and graces of a hundred contrasting women, if she were to hold supremely his allegiance to her

self. The pangs and toils of maternity, while borne, are enough to tax the strongest soul God ever made, to its utmost; but with these upon her she had, in addition, pursued impossible and conflicting objects, incited by her idolatry for a single man; an idolatry which made him not only a god but a never-ceasing goad to her soul. Thus body, brain, and spirit had been overtaxed to meet the incessant and ever-accumulating demands of marriage, through the nature of such a man.

Was there anything that she would not sacrifice to her love for him? Yes, one thing, — else why were she here? — her wifehood, her honor. She had surrendered all, she believed, yet when the test came she could not yield these. She had been ready to sacrifice her nature, if not her soul, to him. And this was the end? She was fleeing from his face and from her home forever. And whither? She had left her friend and her child asleep in the little cabin below, and wrapped in her waterproof cloak had crept upon deck for air. The rushing current from the sea, it seemed to her, would quicken the low, slow beating of her heart; would help her to breathe, for respiration was stifled, and it seemed at times as if her life was ebbing out into unconsciousness. This must not be. She must live. She could not leave her child.

By the uncertain light of a lamp she discerned the form of a man on watch, and knew he was Captain Ben. He would trust no eyes but his own to guard the precious ones whom he believed to be sleeping below. He neither heard nor saw her as she stole to a sheltered spot beneath the shrouds of the vessel. A pile of rope that had been carelessly thrown down

there broke somewhat the force of the wind sweeping over the deck. She involuntarily sank down and leaned against it for support. She looked out across an absolute waste of waters. The tumbled rocks, the low hills of the coast, the coast itself, had long since faded from sight. How awful seemed the vast, solitary stretch of ocean around her ! Was the life before her to be like that !

Far up amid the spars and rigging pale lights were shining, which now and then shot down long white rays to play athwart the mane of an upleaping wave. Afar, at intervals, outflashed the warning light on some dangerous headland, or flamed the revolving planet of some tossing light-ship ; all else was blackness. The clouds hung low and leaden. The wind smote shrouds and sails with a wail almost human. The mounting ocean answered back with monotonous cry. But through winds and waves, straight, strong, and swift rode the sloop. It was as if Agnes held certain rein on the tumultuous courser on which she sat, that tossed and threw her, yet bore her unerringly onward. The eager rush of assailing waves, their steady swash as they slowly washed back into the deep, the creaking cordage, the crying wind before the advancing storm, the blackness of the night, the desolation of the sea, all penetrated her senses, and with them somewhat of the abounding energy surrounding her struck through her still cold veins.

It was fit that such a night and such a sea should bear her from the home that she had left, to the life before her of which she could yet foretell nothing. Crouching there in the darkness, an atom of humanity

only, her heart seemed to reach infinity, in its gratitude that amid this wreck of life she yet held her child, and was not friendless.

"Captain Ben and Mary," she said, "will show me the way to the railway station in Boston. 'Tis but one day's ride to the Lake; and then, Evelyn! She will be sure to meet me there if she is alive. I wrote her to wait for me till I came, if she reached the Lake House before me. What if she is not alive! So much can happen in seven years — so much *has* happened to me; but I cannot make Evelyn dead, or changed, or old. I feel as if I should find her where I left her, the same Evelyn. Yes, she will take me in and hide me from the world."

"The same Evelyn." There she was, standing waiting, watching as the train of cars pushed slowly up to the Lake, just at the sunset of another day. Her calico dress looked not an inch longer, nor a moment older, nor her alpaca apron a thread less shining than they did seven years before. The broad-rimmed hat, tied with brown ribbon, did service still, and the face which it shaded had changed in no essential. It bore a few added lines, perhaps, and a few threads of silver gleamed in the brown curls; but the brown eyes danced and laughed as of old, in the light of endless youth.

"Dear suz me! jes' to think this is *you*, Mis' King!" she exclaimed, with a sound between a laugh and a sob, as she snatched Agnes' hand and drew her out of the crowd struggling toward the Lake House from the platform of the railway station.

"And you knew me, Evelyn?"

"Knew ye! I knowed ye the minnit I sot my eye

on ye! I don't say you haven't changed none, for you have. You're paler an' thinner, an' awful worn-lookin'. But my! I'd know them eyes of your'n in Jericho, if there warn't a smitch of nothin' else left to tell ye by. An' do ye mean to say this little beauty is your baby?"

"My baby, Evelyn; the last of three."

"I knowed she warn't nobody else's baby, and couldn't be, with that hair and them eyes, — your eyes; the rest of her all father," with a sigh. "There ain't no goin' to the Pinnerkel to-night. John would go sure as a whip, straight through the woods, — an' we've burned an' pulled the stumps up out of the road long ago, — but it's twenty mile to the Pinnerkel, an' I say that's too far for you an' this baby, after an all-day's ride from Bostin. I know the clerk at the house here. Why, he's nobody but Nate Billings, from the Corners, if he is a big hotel clerk. I told him I was expectin' a lady an' child from Bostin, who'd be too tired, I knowed, to go over to the Pinnerkel to-night, an' I wanted him to pick out a tip-top room for 'em afore the crowd on the train come; an' he did. Nate Billings knowed 'twasn't no sort o' use takin' on big airs to me, if he is a hotel clerk. Why! I've spanked him many's the time, when he was a young un. He jes' give me a room lookin' spat out on the lake. I know you'll like it, Mis' King."

"I know I shall, you good Evelyn," said Agnes, without telling her friend that she had intended to brave the fatigue and dangers of the drive through the woods that night, for the sake of the slender little purse hidden in her bosom. But Evelyn was right

She would rest till morning, and trust the future with God a little further still. How she had personally dreaded to enter the great summer hotel, with its memories of happy days, she did not know till, following Evelyn, who carried Vida, she walked alone up to its thronged piazza. She was more severely tested still when a few moments later she found herself in the very room occupied by Cyril and herself seven years before.

Seven years, which had winnowed her heart and left it desolate, had not stolen a tint of brightness from the fair world without.

The previous day of wind and rain had swept every film from the vast amphitheatre of sky. The opaline mountains lifted their mighty shoulders into a sea of silver mingled with fire, while the lake, another molten sea, gleamed at their feet. The daily steamer, its flags and streamers gorgeous in the sunset, floated slowly toward the hotel, laden with pleasure-seekers. Its band in scarlet coats were playing airs from "Martha," which fainted in sweetness far out upon the waters, or were caught up in tender reverberations by the surrounding hills. The same window, the same picture of seven years ago.

Vida clapped her hands and cried out with delight, while she was held back from going out the window by the strong hand of her new friend, Evelyn. Agnes held back the crowding tears, but it was a blanched face that she turned to view as she spoke.

"Evelyn," she said, "I wrote you that I was in trouble, and coming to you. I did not tell you that I was coming to stay. *Can* I stay with you, Ev

elyn? Except this child, I have nothing left in this world."

"Mister Cyril! He ain't dead?"

"Yes, Evelyn, dead to me. Dead, dead! More dead than if I had kissed his face in his coffin, and had seen it shut forever from my sight."

"Dear suz mè! But it ain't surprisin', not to me. He never seemed stiddy-minded, not like you; kinder feather-brained, blowin' this way an' that, fur all he was so smart. Many's the time I've sot on my front door-steps, an' tried to study it out, jest what screw *was* loose; an' I never could tell, till I bought a phrenology book of a pedler at the Corners. Now I know jest what the trouble is, Mis' King. His conjugality ain't more than two; an' as for his conscientiousness, 'tain't nothin'. An' I'd mark you seven in both. Yes, I would," seizing Agnes' head, "an' there ain't no higher number or I'd mark you with *that*."

"I don't think I understand you, Evelyn," said Agnes, smiling in spite of herself as she felt her head held in the vice of Evelyn's strong fingers. "I know nothing whatever of phrenology."

"Of course you don't. If you had, you'd married a minister, and let Mister Cyril gone to his own kind. Veneration! Spirituality! big as eggs. Oh my!"

Evelyn was making statements. She forebore to ask questions. She was saying to herself, "Poor little cretur'! She may tell me jest what she has a mind tu, an' no more. I shan't harrer her by askin' her nuthin'. If I can get her mind off on phrenology, so much the better."

But Agnes had "a mind" to tell her friend every

thing that was necessary to a perfect understanding between themselves.

"I may have to depend upon you many times in the future," she said; "thus it is best that you should know just how it is with me. All I can tell of my trouble I will tell now. Then if we can help it we will never mention it again."

It was a brief statement of facts that she gave Evelyn. She did not dwell upon her own pain, and she did not know how indelibly it had stamped itself upon her youthful face. She was tender of him still. She could not hide the cruel fact that he had been false to her, that he had left her in heart, if not in name, for another; "but he has been so sorely tempted, he is infatuated, he is not himself, Evelyn," she said pitiously, pleading his cause while trying to state her own.

"Oh yes, he is jest himself," replied Evelyn, "an' you are jest yourself; that's what's the matter. You, with conjugality seven, makin' the whole world out of him, feelin' that the sun rose and set in him, with no eye nor ear fur no other man on earth, warn't goin' to divide him with no other woman; of course not—'twarn't in natur'.

"I'm awful sorry for ye, child," said Evelyn, breaking a silence, "an' I might as well tell ye the truth. Your room is ready an' waitin', an' has bin this long time. I felt it in my bones, you'd come back some day. I didn't know when, but sooner or later, I was sure. An' when I didn't hear nothin' from ye in so long, I said to myself, 'Ev., you're jest a fool, to think the Honerabel Mis' King, a-livin' in Washington, is

ever a-comin' ag'in to stop in a log-house.' But I kep' your room ready jest the same. An' somehow, every chance I got, 'twas lots of comfort to fix it up. 'She'll like this or t'other,' I said, 'for I know she'll see the old Pinnerkel ag'in afore she dies, she set such a store by it; an' she never tuk on no airs, an' nobody can make me believe that bein' an honerabel has changed her a mite.' True as gospel, deary, your room is ready an' waitin', little chair an' all."

No profuse thanks filled the air. A pair of arms were outstretched, and a still, white face went down upon Evelyn's breast, and lay there as if it was a little child's, while tears slowly trickled down the thin cheeks; and Vida, with a positive intention of not being left out, mounted into Evelyn's lap also and laid her cherub face beside her mother's.

"No trunk nor nothin'," said Evelyn ruefully, as Agnes with her little girl and small reticule ascended the ancient buggy behind the venerable John, the next morning. "It makes me madder'n all the rest to think you left everything for *her*, the hussy."

"You are mistaken, Evelyn; she had all I called mine that she wanted, before I left. She wants nothing else. She is very rich."

"Then I hate her all the more," said Evelyn. "Charity for sech ain't to be thought on."

One must pass beyond the cry of the railway whistle to enter solitude. Then and not till then is civilization at your back, and your face set toward nature. Evelyn had breathed out her wonted sighs over the Castle and the memory of her lost friend Isabella Dufferin Street was passed, and John's head was

turned toward the broad uplands and deep woods of Tarnstone. With stiff joints and solemn visage he was bearing back to nature's solitudes a child who loved her.

How much she loved her, the all-healing mother, this child did not know, nor think; yet under all the wounds which life had made upon her heart, she felt the old delight quicken and thrill as they passed into the grateful shade of the primeval forest. The lofty maples and elms, taller, more stately than the southern oak, wove an arcade far up in the air. Spruce, hemlock, tamarack, and balsam trees ran their needles and fringes of darker green in and out amid the light emerald foliage of the maple, elm, and birch, while all were shot through and through with sunshine and rifts of blue sky. Great wafts of warm fragrance swept over them from the depths of the wood. It was pervading and haunting in the suggestions of its odors. One instant it seemed all exuded from the ripe red raspberries that held up their tantalizing bunches by the road, the next it seemed all to flow from the life-giving balsam of the firs, and the clustering cones of the spruce hanging overhead; then to sweep upward in the spicy breath of the ferns crowding close with dipping plumes by the way, or to be wafted downward in faint perfume from the snowy blossoms of the wild clematis, that ran in airy festoons from tree to tree.

Through miles of warm shade and aromatic air they rode, before they emerged from the woods to behold before them, resplendent in midday sunshine, the green Pinnacle, the Tarn flashing beneath its fringing

cedars, the log-house by its side. In a single glance Agnes saw with what added grace nature had touched it in seven years. The mountain-ash, whose clustering berries rested on the roof when she saw it last, held them up now high in the sunshine. The tiger lily reached far above the window. The clematis and woodbine, which she herself planted, now ran in exquisite tracery over all the rude walls. The little orchard bore a richer fruitage, the garden was braver with bright flowers, the fields were broader and more opulent in ripening grain, the woods before the house had receded, but lifted a deeper frontage of foliage to the sky. There were the sheep pushing their noses through the pasture fence, the spring leaping by the grassy yard, the cosset lamb rubbing its rotund sides against the corner of the house with all the old blissful content.

Evelyn took Vida into her arms and led Agnes directly to her own little room ; the very same room that she left with such loving regret seven years before ; and yet how many touches of brightness as well as of beauty a loving hand had added. Through the parted curtains of sheer muslin on the windows were revealed the Pinnacle and the Tarn on one side, the woods and pasture on the other. The log walls were neatly covered with white cotton cloth, and decorated with prints and engravings in neat frames. A bright carpet covered the floor, and a lady's small sewing and writing table stood by the window opening upon the Pinnacle.

“Look a’ heræ!” exclaimed Evelyn, drawing back white curtain above it, and showing a small set of

pine shelves packed close with books. "These are my comforters, an' they shall be your'n. When I'm all tuckered out an' sort o' lonesome, I jes' come in here an' read my Phrenology, an' look over my scrap-book, an' paste in all I've saved up out of the old newspapers I find at Dufferin an' at the Corners an' everywhere else; for I save my own newspapers. Ain't these nice scrap-books?" taking down a set of ledgers whose accounts of cash and barter were almost covered over with strips of poetry and prose. "They're lots o' comfort to me, I can tell ye. An' these books, libra'y editions every one. My! I'd never got 'em in my lifetime, only the Monteith Libra'y was sold at auction at last, an' the estate owed me for my work an' I took 'em toward the debt. It seemed kind o' hard at fust, for they didn't half pay me for my scrubbin' an' bakin', but I'm glad now, deary. Jes' cum out an' see my little faces, an' then I'll go straight an' get you some dinner."

Agnes, with Vida pulling at her skirt, followed Evelyn, and found her "faces" to be a solid phalanx of pansies covering the southern embankment of the house.

"Now, if them *ain't* faces," exclaimed Evelyn, "human faces, an' King Charles spaniel faces, then I never see none. They're more company than the books; an' when I'm clean gone for a chat, I jes' come out an' talk to 'em, an' there's no end to the queer faces they make up at me."

CHAPTER XXIV.

EARNING HER LIVING.

"THERE'S millinerin'," said Evelyn; "you could make your everlastin' fortin in a shop at the Corners. Everybody was askin' me on Sunday who trimmed my bunnit. There warn't no other bunnit in meetin' to compare with it. Never see anybody in my life could make a bow with a single twist of her fingers, and sech a bow as you ken."

"Yes, I can make a bow or a bonnet; the only things in the world I am sure I can make that might bring in money. What I feel no power to manage would be the business part; the buying of goods, the coming in contact with people. Oh, Evelyn, I feel as if I could not see anybody. I want to stay here, inside of these woods, shut away from all the world!" said Agnes.

"Cert'in you do; but it's mighty uncert'in that would be the best for ye. Ye can't do nuthin' in this world, queeny, not even makin' a bunnit, without facin' it. But I guess I ken fix it for ye. There's Mis' Buzzill. I'll jest go over to the Corners an' talk her into the notion of settin' up shop ag'in. She's mighty anxious to do it. She shet up 'cause nobody liked her bunnits. She hain't a mite o' taste. When she had a shop all the Dufferin folks that didn't get their bunnits

from Montreal got 'em at the Lake, an' from Bostin they warn't goin' to wear her flarin' scuttles when they could buy city bunnits for no more money. I'll tell her you're from the city, an' that you both can make a fortin in a shop, if you set up together. You ken make the bunnits an' trim 'em, and she can buy goods an' talk to the folks. What could be more satisfyin'?"

"Nothing, in its way; if you can bring it about, Evelyn."

"Wall, I ken. I feel certain sure. I'll hev you both sot up for the fall trade. An' when winter comes, an' the dull time, an' the snow shets us in, why, you ken jest stay in your little room with money to spare, an' take your comfort and nothin' to hender."

"You good Evelyn! how bright and easy you make everything look. I feel equal to doing anything that I attempt, when I listen to you, but when I think of it alone by myself it seems impossible that I should really bring anything to pass."

"You see what *you* want, deary, is *backbone*. I never see nobody in my life that I liked better, but you *do* need stiff'nin'."

"Then you must be my stiffener, Evelyn. I am sorry to think how I shall worry you with my limpness. I know there's not an hour in the day that I do not feel as if I must double up for good, and never hold up my head again. I don't believe I could, if it were not for my child."

"Oh, yes ye could; 'tain't in ye to die, not yit. Jest think on it! Is one man *all* the world? A mighty mean little world to my thinkin', considerin' what's left; an' jest as much for you as for anybody God ever made. Now jest remember that!"

"I will," and that instant Agnes' eyes rested on the green earth outside the cottage door, and despite all, she knew that she loved it.

"Ef a thing's to be done, the only way to get it done is to go straight an' do it," said Evelyn, sententiously, as she gave a shining milk-pan a final rub, and started to harness John for a drive to the Corners.

"How my way is all prepared and made smooth for me by others, by those upon whom I have no mortal claim save that which their kind hearts give me!" said Agnes, as sitting on the door-step she watched Evelyn and John vanish out of sight into the woods.

Nearly three weeks had passed since she came to the Pinnacle. She had risen at last from the shock and torpor of grief which laid her low after her arrival. She faced her future. She gazed without shrinking upon all she believed that it held for her — loneliness and labor. The first was an old companion, the second she would make her friend; she shrank only from the contacts that it must bring her. She dreaded the friction of dissonant tastes and of unequal culture; the curiosity of human nature, probing the veiled sanctuary of the heart; its thoughtless criticism, which holds so little tender mercy even for the guiltless. These were thongs in the scourge of life which she must bear, and perhaps more and more as the years went on. What she could not bear would be to eat the bread of dependence, to be a burden to those upon whom she had no claim, least of all to those who had nothing themselves save what they had wrung from the earth by long years of patient toil. Yet if she had stayed in the world how few things there were that she

could have done that would have won support to herself and her child. She could paint pictures — pictures full of feeling touched with inspiration in tint and expression; but her later years had taken from her almost the last chance of improvement in this direction. Even were she the mistress of technical art, how could she paint pictures enough or find people enough to buy them, to pay for shelter, food, raiment, and the education of Vida? What would it not be to her to embody and hold in palpable form somewhat of the evanescent beauty this moment hovering around her? The steel-like scintillations of the Tarn flashing through the hedge of willows which fringed it; the purple flush upon the Pinnacle, resting on it like the dewy bloom on a new-gathered plum; the shifting sunlight in which the woodbine leaves quivered transfigured above her head; even the gnarled, moss-lined, fern-fringed stump by the door: if she could but reflect a tithe of what she saw, and send it far away to the great city, if but as a dim reproduction and revelation of the alchemies of color and form wrought by the mother-earth in her solitudes, it would be a joy indeed. “But not money, alas! not money,” she sighed. “I must have money; to have it, I must earn it.”

She could paint life in words. If well or ill she could not tell, she had but so lately learned that she could paint it at all. Her heart gave a throb at the thought of the little manuscript book still hidden in her reticule; of the impassioned words of love, faith, sorrow, that it held; words wrung from her soul in the silence of her darkened chamber, in the aspiration and desolation of her isolated heart. Had it not been

for loss, loneliness, suffering, and experience, **those** words could never have been written. Had she gleaned in the fields of knowledge for naught! Had she garnered into her storehouse only for her own use? Had she loved, suffered, grown strong, still for her own sake only? Was there no other woman out in the great world somewhere, bereft, alone, as she was, to whom she could send sympathy, if only by a thought? It would comfort her own heart if she could.

But it was not to be thought of. Who would print her poor little words, however true? Was she in any wise certain that her brain or heart held aught that another wanted? She felt in no way sure. She felt sure of nothing save that she could trim a bonnet, and make one. And she felt grateful that in her daily labor she could yet apply the artist-faculty which God had given her, if only in the lowliest and lightest forms of art. The model bonnet that imperceptibly shaped itself before her inward sight, what did it mean to her? It meant independence, the power to help others, the education of her child. "For I shall live here always," she said; "I shall work, think, remember, grow old, and die here. And Vida! Ah, if they do not some day rob me of her, I shall want her, too, to live here always—away from the wicked, wicked world. I will teach her above everything to be simple, truthful, content; to expect little, yet to live for the most and the noblest in little things, hour by hour."

She drew a letter from her bosom. It was from her faithful friend Mary, to whom she bade farewell with many blessings and many tears at the railway station in Boston. It was written at her parting request, and

gave her the only information which she had received from Lotusmere since her flight. All Lotusport knew of her departure, the letter said, but nobody knew whither she had gone. Had she gone by the railway, dozens would have seen her at the station or on the cars; but going as she did, no dweller in Lotusport knew it but Captain Ben and his wife. "Need I say, honored friend," the letter went on, "that you are safe with us? No mortal could wring from us a word that you would not wish us to tell. I've not seen anybody who seemed surprised, nor nobody who don't pity you. The house is all shut up like. They do say that the gentleman himself has gone altogether, and that nobody be there but Miss Kane. I only know what I hear.

"But I did go up the back path last night, when I was sure none could see, and did pick for you this violet from your little boy's grave, sure it would be dear to your aching heart."

On these words tears dropped, the first that had fallen from Agnes' eyes that morning. She had no reason to suppose that her husband had made any effort to ascertain where she might be. "Why should he? How could he?" she asked herself. She knew too well that Cyril did not even wish to look in her face; to see there the consciousness that she had read those two letters. Their words had separated them for all time, — they made the end. "The end!" she said aloud with convulsive sob. "Never, never again on earth am I to look into his eyes and know him to be mine, mine only! My only love, the life of my life. My husband! I have no husband. I, who have lived

so long in and for another wholly, henceforth **must live** alone, alone to the end. I, who have been deemed **all** weakness, must now be all strength."

And still beyond that "end" she seemed to see him, clothed upon with his right mind, born again through suffering into a similitude of the ideal man of her youth, her own once more, and she his, — but not for earth. She did not understand how she could see him thus.

Evelyn returned from Dufferin Corners flushed with delight, her eyes dancing in her head with triumph.

"Mis' Buzzill is buzzin' round like a bumblebee in a bunnit, I can tell ye," she said, all unconscious of her alliteration. "She's as tough as a biled owl in her disposition, as well as in her constitooshun. My! what an individooal to get sot into traces, and sech! No matter what way you pull, she pulls t'other, unless she knows it's in the direction of a dollar, an' she *sees* the dollar. A dollar's dearer to 'er than 'er soul, enuff sight. I can manage 'er. I made 'er see the dollar an' the heaps of dollars you'll bring in, an' the toughest thing to do I did: I made it the main spoke in the wheel that the dollars were to be shared ekul, you have jest as many as 'er. She was tough on that, I can tell ye. 'A quarter, a quarter,' for you, she sed, would be jest fair. 'Not much,' sez I; 'if she pays fur half of the fixin's an' duz all the work, and throws in 'er rep-utashun, half or nothin',' sez I; an' sot my back, an' wouldn't give in, didn't give in, an inch. Half of all profits will be your'n, deary. An' if you hev'n't the money to spare to buy half o' the goods, I hev, out o my butter money. You're welcome to it, a thousand

times; an' you ken pay me back out o' the profits when you git ready."

"I can never pay you back Evelyn, never, — not a thousandth part of what I owe you already."

"Stuff! I gi'n in one thing, only one; I hed to, in reason, you see, to promise 'er I'd bring you over to talk with 'er afore she went fur the goods. You'll hev to tell 'er, you know, what to git, an' you'll hev to be with 'er ev'ry day after you set up shop. Mebbe it's jest as well to git broke in one time as t'other," said Evelyn, sympathetically. "An' I've turned the road for you, an' tore up the snags an' heaved 'em out of sight, so you'll find it tol'able smooth runnin', I guess."

"I will go with you in the morning," said Agnes bravely. "And you told her all that had to be told, Evelyn?" in a trembling voice, "so that I shall not be in terror of her questions?"

"I told 'er you was a widder. You *are* a widder, ain't ye? The most unfortinit sort of a widder, to my thinkin'! I give 'er the name you sed, Missis Darcy. I fas'en'd my tongue stiff an' long on missis, I can tell ye. I sed it then, if I never sed it afore. There ain't one chance in a million that a soul that sees ye will spot ye as Mis' King. You and Mister Cyril never went on to Dufferin Street all the time you was here afore, only to cum an' go. An' as they never knowed your faces as sech, even at Hi' Sanderson's, where I told all about ye, an' bragged on ye, I can tell ye, how ken a soul on 'em, now, think as Mis' King and Missis Darcy is one an' the same individooal? Not much."

Evelyn did not over-estimate her success, nor mistake the disposition of Miss Buzzill.

“Acquisitiveness an’ alimentiveness, they stick out on ’er head e’enamost as big as turkey’s eggs. I felt ’em. When she thought I was rubbin’ her head down for the nervous headache, I felt ’em. She thought I was makin’ the passes, an’ I was; but they wasn’t all I was doin’. I meant to hev the bumps on her cran’um settled once for all, afore you got into its clutches; an’ I settled ’em. I know jest what they be. My! Ef her eyes were sot only a little nearer together, an’ conscientiousness hed ben the least trifle smaller, she’d ben a thief — which now she isn’t. Jest keep ’er sartin the dollars are comin’ in, an’ keep ’er stomic full, an’ you won’t hev no trouble, not a mite. I’ll keep ye supplied in cookies an’ crullers, an’ when you see she’s gittin’ fractious, jest you say, ‘Mis’ Buzzill, hev a cruller? Mis’ Buzzill, do take a cookie!’ an’ she’ll be all right.”

Agnes obeyed Evelyn’s injunctions with extreme benefit to herself. She soon discovered that poor Miss Buzzill, though largely endowed with both, was by no means all acquisitiveness or all alimentiveness. She had “her good streaks,” even Evelyn acknowledged, and Agnes was not slow to find them out. Perhaps the most strongly marked was her love for little children. The lonely woman, whom her compatriots called “a stingy, crooked old maid,” had ever a tender spot in her heart and a sugar-plum in her pocket for every little child she met.

“I ought to hev teched philoprogenitiveness,” said Evelyn, after listening to Agnes’ recital of Miss Buzzill’s fondness for Vida; “but I was so overcome with the bigness of t’other bumps, I never thought on’t

Nat'relly one wouldn't, with an old maid, knowin' she hed no sort o' use for sech a bump."

"I think she makes great use of it," said Agnes. "I could forget every fault in one so kind to little children. And it is so much to me to have Vida with me; I couldn't have her if she was disagreeable to Miss Buzzill, and in her way."

Thus a little child led them in their lowly daily path of work and small traffic. She made a bond of unity between two women who by nature and by fate held naught else in common save their lonely state. Agnes' wish to be a silent partner also went far to soothe Miss Buzzill's professional pride, and to propitiate her personal favor. It was still "Miss Buzzill's shop." Miss Buzzill took orders and received payments, and was the acknowledged head of the establishment; a fact exasperating to Evelyn, but very pleasant to Miss Buzzill. Quite by herself in a little inner room, Agnes made the bonnets; and it was the bonnets that brought in money and fame, a fact Miss Buzzill did not forget, as she proved by being kinder to Agnes than she was to anybody else except Agnes' child; in her fashion, at the bottom of her heart, she loved both.

Perhaps all the more for her seclusion, the fame of "the new Dufferin milliner" spread abroad. She was "from Paris," "from London," as it happened; but wherever from, she was "a high-born lady reduced," a widow and yet not a widow. Her husband — an earl, a lord, somebody of grand degree — had fallen into disgrace and fled, and she had taken refuge in the Dominion. But whether a countess in exile or a grisette in disguise, all agreed that the bonnets she

made had an air of grace and "style" unknown before as a home product of Dufferin. "The quality," as Evelyn called them, sent less frequently to Montreal or "home" to London, for bonnets; the middle class withdrew their patronage from the Lake, and Miss Buzzill flourished and drew money into her drawer beyond her wildest dreams.

Nor was Agnes without positive pleasure in her work, for it was success. If it was patience and weariness and sideache sometimes, it was taste and beauty and reward in the ultimate. Her keen artistic sense lightened and crowned her labor. When she held up a bonnet finished as perfectly as her hands could fashion it, the pleasure she felt in beholding it was the same in quality, if fainter in degree, as that which filled her when she used to hold up a picture to her eyes, as good as she could make it. And never in all her life had she seen money look like this which was laid in her hand by Miss Buzzill. She had earned it. Miss Buzzill might look melancholy, as she involuntarily did, to part with (to her) so many beloved dollars; but her gloomy visage some way failed to chill Agnes' delight. She had worked for them; because she had worked for them skilfully, tirelessly, faithfully, they were hers. She was not receiving dole, but just recompense; and as she realized this, these dollars took on a dignity and brightness no dollars had ever worn in her eyes before. As usual, she, the person most concerned, was the last to hear the faint whispers afloat in the air concerning her. Nor was it strange that they floated so wide of the truth. Though not far beyond the boundary, she was never

theless in a foreign country ; certainly far enough in it to discover that the natives of the Dominion emulated their kindred "at home" across the Atlantic in this, as in all else, their supreme indifference to all the internal life of "the States."

It is instinctively pleasant to the monarchical Briton complacently to ignore the crude Republican life which he inherently despises. Dufferin liked its milliner, was proud of her ; she did not look like a "Yankee," did look like a lady ; she had a mystery, else she would never choose to live in a log-house in the wilderness ; thus it was most agreeable to the Dufferin mind to believe that she came from London. Believing this, it was in little danger of finding out where she really did come from, while every new story springing from its own premises shot further and further from the truth.

Dufferin Street had bought its last bonnet for the season. There was nothing to be done in the shop beyond the powers of Miss Buzzill to perform ; thus she was reluctantly compelled to acquiesce when Agnes, with Vida, withdrew to Tarnstone Pinnacle, there in seclusion to await the "spring opening," which Miss Buzzill intended should be of a magnificence unknown before in all the chronicles of Dufferin.

The eager torches of color that the autumn bore had flamed and gone out on forest and Pinnacle. The spruces and firs and cedars now pierced the steely air with stings and needles of tawny green. There are no half tones or tints in this dazzling land of the North, his land of swift transitions, and of vivid effects. Suddenly, in early September, in a single night, the frost fell. In the morning, every flower in the garden

stood stiff and stark in mail of ice. Agnes could have wept over these late-born tender children of the northern year, over the little frozen faces of the pansies, the dead sweet-peas and tube-roses, slaughtered innocents. Another night the heavens danced with auroras. Wave after wave of rose-red flame rolled up from the horizon. Through this ruddy sea in quick succession flew innumerable lances of ever-changing hues, violet and primrose, rose-red, the palest pink, the faintest azure shooting to the zenith; while the whole concave of heaven throbbed and flashed in coruscating splendor.

In the morning, lo! nature's reaction! Heaven's fiery glow gone out in ashen gray. Gray upon the sky, gray in all the air; snow, dense and spotless, lying heavy upon the earth; the cedars fringed with ermine; the firs stretching out their strong arms and lifting up their cone-like crowns swathed in the same immaculate fleece. Then the gray curtain was lifted, and the sun, riding through a dazzling heaven, drew the earth's whiteness after him and exhaled it into the snow-clouds that canopied his setting. After the melting of the first snow came the Indian summer. It was the soul of the earlier summer come back with a pleading softness in its breath that the first summer had not. Misty banners trembled about the mountain-tops. The whole world seemed to float in nebulous gold. The atmosphere was penetrated with a vague, haunting sweetness. Wafts of winey fragrance came up from the beds of moist, ripe leaves that lined the forest, from the spicy ferns still peering green from their shaded coverts, and from the exuding balsams of the spruces and firs.

In this halcyon season Agnes and Vida lived in the

woods. These had no voice nor language that Agnes did not know. These had no minor tone that did not penetrate her exquisitely attuned ear. Boughs just astir in the still air, the patter of the dropping nut, the tiny rustle of the squirrel in the leaves, the cry of the cricket in the russet grass, each gave out its own distinct note of music to her soul. From color, odor, sound, were woven these perfect days. To this woman alone, a sense of yearning came out of their opaline deeps. All she had lost, the more she had missed, haunted indefinably their sad and subtle beauty. There was a sadness in the soul of the season that touched the sadder soul within her.

Suddenly as it came, the Indian summer went. It was winter at once. The dead pansies were buried beneath the embankment of straw that encircled the log-house. Double windows and doors were set to protect its inmates from the freezing cold without. By day and night the snow fell, till it made the forest road impassable, and piled up around the cottage solid walls as high as itself. Jim Dare, now grown an athletic fellow, spent many days cutting paths through this mass. By degrees a way was made through it past the woods, but the mass remained on the frozen earth to be subdued and melted away only by the late May sun. At long intervals the south wind rose and the rain fell just long enough to let the night set every tree, bough, and leafy spray, and even the Pinnacle itself, in mail of crystal that froze and glittered in the sunlight, and transformed the whole scene into a sight of enchantment.

No matter what the mutations of the elemental world

might be, within the log house all was warmth and comfort. No winter was rigorous enough to exhaust Evelyn's woodpile, that pile of split and seasoned maple so dear to every northern heart. Nor could any North American winter be long enough to exhaust her garnered stores; her grain of wheat and corn, of barley and buckwheat. Had not Daisy been sacrificed for beef and candles, and Towzer for spare-rib and "cracklin"? Towzer was a pig, who never grew to be a hog. He lived in a palace of a pen, he had his weekly bath, and his daily conversations with his mistress as she poured out his smoking repasts of potatoes and meal, through all his earthly sojourn. Evelyn shed many tears at the thought of his demise, yet she slew him no less, and now Towzer, the quintessence of "pig-pork," was packed in a barrel in the depths of Evelyn's cellar, a source of pride to her heart greater even than when he grunted his replies to her remarks from out of his well-kept sty. Her kitchen walls were garlanded with strings of dried apples, and white bags filled with dried blackberries and Canadian plums. It was garnished also with many bunches of dried pennyroyal and peppermint, summer savory, sage, and thyme; and, biggest of all, bunches of dried catnip for her cats. Her skeins of snowy wool had long been ready for the spinning. Before the autumn days were done, her yarn was spun and ready. By the time the winter nights began, Evelyn was at her winter occupation, busily knitting; this time, a pair of red and white stockings for Vida.

Agnes' winter rest had come. She spent it chiefly in her own little inner room, teaching her child, making necessary garments thinking long, long thoughts,

contrasting the life she lived now, the solitude surrounding her, with her life at the capital two winters before, her life at Lotusmere one year ago. Could a more utter transition come to any life? She never forgot the large debt of gratitude that she owed to Evelyn even in little things, and spent many evenings reading to her and listening to her chatter, when had she listened to her own inner impulse, only, she would have stayed in the solitude of her own room.

Saturday brought the crowning night of the week, for it was on Saturday only that Jim Dare mounted John and rode through snow and biting cold to Dufferin for the mail. It was never a large one, nevertheless it was the event of the week. It brought to Agnes a letter from her only correspondent, "Mary Ben," as she lovingly called her: a letter that made her hands tremble as she opened it, and her heart often ache — oh, how hopelessly! — after reading it. Yet as if she delighted in self torture, she would not be deprived of it. It brought also Evelyn's "Tribune," and the journals and magazines in which Agnes sparingly indulged, to keep her brain from starving.

"I'd like to know what's to hender," exclaimed Evelyn on one of these winter Saturday nights, as she thrust out a newspaper to Agnes, who sat with a bleached face and a far-distant look in her eyes, after reading a letter which she had silently dropped into her pocket. Speechless she was, yet how her heart dumbly cried within her. Mary Ben wrote that "she had been told that Miss Kane had gone to Ulm to visit her friends. Mr. King had gone to Washington, and Lotusmere was closed for the winter." She was inly

crying for her home, for her lost love, for her buried child.

"There's nuthin' in the world to hender," said Evelyn. "You talk like a book, an' I know ye can write one if you want to; an' somehow I've sot my heart on your gittin' that hundred dollars. You've only to say you will, an you'll git it; I'm sure on't," and she pointed to the advertisement of a Boston publishing house, offering one hundred dollars as a prize to the competitor who should write the best story for boys, the prize to be awarded by impartial judges.

"I'd like to know what's to hender?" again asked Evelyn, as Agnes looked up after reading the notice. "Here's *language* bulgin' out your eyes big as plums back of each on 'em; an' as for boys, nothin' is more surprisin' than the knowledge you hev on 'em, except the patience you show to 'em. An' you jest write that book. Come, now, you'll try, won't ye, deary?" in the most wheedling tones. "My heart is perfectly sot on it."

"I would do anything in my power that your heart was set on; you know that," said Agnes warmly, "but I should never for one instant feel as if I could win this hundred dollars. And if I try and fail, as I'm almost certain to do, you will feel worse, Evelyn, than if I hadn't tried at all."

"Jest you try!" said Evelyn oracularly, steadyin' her dancing brown eyes into a measuring look fixed upon Agnes. "Bumps don't lie, nev-er. Faces don't lie, for they can't, no matter if they do try; an' a feelin' heart don't lie, not when it's chock full an' runnin' over with love an' sorrer. Be a good little ga-

an' try — jest to please me, won't ye?" and Evelyn, getting up, smoothed back Agnes' hair and kissed her forehead.

Agnes burst into tears. It was a little thing, a loving thing, for the toil-hardened hand to do, for the simple, honest lips to express. There were none others to caress or to love her now, and this fact, with the touch and action, bringing back so utterly as they did the caress and kiss of another, — alas! how far back in the past! — just at this moment were more than Agnes' overstrained heart could receive without visible emotion.

"Anything I can do I will try to do, to please you, Evelyn," she said, as she rose to go in to her child. Sleep was not for her that night. The uprooted past, Mary Ben's letter, Evelyn's injunction, her own aching heart and tumultuous brain, forbade it. But she slept late into the morning. Evelyn amused Vida in the kitchen, "shewed" Jim into his Sunday clothes, and walked her domain on tiptoe, that Agnes might sleep. She appeared at last with a perfectly serene face.

"Evelyn," she said quietly, "I will write the boys' book, if you can promise me one thing: that you won't take it very much to heart if I don't get the prize. It is in my power to write something, but it may be far from my power to win the hundred dollars. If you'll promise to keep this in mind, so as not to be too much disappointed, I will try."

"I'll promise anything, queeny if you'll try," said the conquering Evelyn, as she gave the final Sabbath twist to a corkscrew curl before her fifty-cent looking-glass, prior to settling herself for her Sunday reading.

consisting of her hymn-book and Bible, with the *almanac* and phrenological tracts interspersed by way of condiments.

Nothing came so near to Agnes as the life of a boy. For more than seven years she lived in closest sympathy with the boy nature. It had no fault, no need, that she did not know. She had sympathized with her boy in everything, from his yearning for a "a good little bear," to his eager questionings of the heavenly mysteries to which his young soul so soon went forth. Through him she cared for all living boys. When she shut herself up to consider them, she found that it was not the impossible, unnatural, "goody" boy, but the every-day, sinning, much-suffering, knocked-about, denounced, "trounced," yet ever beloved boy of the human family, whom her heart yearned over. Was she not his spontaneous defender and saviour from a little child? Yes, she had something for him! a story of help and cheer and happiness she would make for this boy, wherever on the earth he might be, and in her heart dedicate it to the memory of her own lost one, for whose sake all other boys had grown yet more dear.

Thus in the little log-house in the northern solitude, the work of brain and heart began. Did the will never falter? the heart never grow weary? Often. How often, only they can tell who, without encouragement, without cheer from any assured source, shut away from every exterior prop, resting on their own souls alone, weave on to completeness the web of thought and experience spun from the brain and life, perhaps from the very life-blood of the heart. What is easier than to

pass judgment on the work, to criticise any lack of finish, even in its passage? But if it be woven of the stuff out of which human life is made, it is never lightly or easily done.

Agnes wrote with fulness and power only when she forgot what she was doing. Then heart, soul, and brain gave of their overflow without effort and without stint. But the moment the conscious thought came of what she was attempting, all assurance of touch left her. A deep distrust of her powers, a sense of her own temerity, made both mind and hand falter and halt. What right had she to suppose, because she had insight in her soul and love in her heart to respond to the need of the every-day boy, that she had also the gift to embody either in a form to which the rather-hard-to-be-suited little man would spontaneously respond? She painted the truth, then was afraid of it. She would attempt to hold it far out from her mental vision, and pronounce judgment upon it as if she were a disinterested judge. Nobody, nobody on earth, fit to decide upon it, would say that was just the fancy or thing to put into a story. She was sure of it. Her soul was brave, her mind was timid. She was without experience. She had never won success. She was alone. The world was wide and cold. Could she ever venture to send her fledgling out into it adrift? If she did, it would drop and die for lack of shelter and warmth. Where in all the world was the hand strong and true to take it in, care for it, start it for steady though lowly flight?

Of all these things and many more she was too keenly conscious for her work's good. She had many

despondent days, when she shut up her portfolio and locked it out of sight, in regret and humility of soul. That the beloved image of her little hero could ever be painted by her hand was impossible; of that she felt certain. It remained for her to go back to Miss Buzzill and her bonnets; she could make a bonnet, a pretty one; she had proved that; but to make the word-portrait of a living boy, alive, life-inspiring as well as life-destroying, to do *him* justice was beyond her power. On the whole she was glad she had learned it before she had proved her failure by demonstrated defeat in the shape of a publisher's pitilessly polite note of refusal. Nevertheless, in characteristic defiance of her fiats, the boy of her heart was often too much for her wavering will. In spite of all her doubt and dread as to how he would look to others who loved him not, she loved him so entirely, and saw him so distinctly, that the passion to individualize him, to paint him as she saw him, would overpower all the menacing thoughts waiting in ambush, and with sure but delicate strokes the image of the boy traced amid all his environments and entanglements became week by week more vividly distinct. And when in the unconscious glow of creation she held him up to the eyes of untutored Evelyn, who laughed and cried over him with equal delight, Agnes had already found her audience and tasted the only unalloyed sweet of authorship.

Thus the soul-child grew in shade and sunshine, amid laughter and tears. He had attained the perfect stature of his boyhood, and his whole story was told, before Miss Buzzill returned with her spring goods from Montreal. The very day that Jim Dare carried

the precious package containing his story in his inside pocket through the woods and over the hills to the post-office at Dufferin, Miss Buzzill herself appeared in the door of the log-house at the Pinnacle. She came to inquire when "Madame Darcy" (as she was called by Evelyn's "quality") would come to the Corners to make ready for "the opening." Miss Buzzill's orange-tinged countenance was illuminated by a bonnet of the brightest canary. She said, "I thought I'd give 'em at meetin' jest a spec of what's comin'. None of yer gay, dashin' colors for me, I can tell ye. What I will hev is a plain, stiddy yaller."

CHAPTER XXV.

ULM NEIL.

THE spring wore on into summer. To Agnes the days were all alike. She had glimpses of the universal splendor without, from the little window where she sat at work, but till past mid-August her old daily communion with the natural world was perpetually interrupted. As Miss Buzzill said, "the work hung on. She never seed nuthin' like it afore."

The bees droned in the little garden. The humming-birds flashed past the open window. From the early mornings, through the palpitating noons, through the long, luminous midsummer twilights, Agnes worked on. She worked as patiently, as skilfully, as successfully, as in the autumn before. Only she knew that her work cost her more inward effort now than it did then. Because her employment had lost somewhat the novelty of a new experience ; because it was summer and she longed for out-of-door sunshine and air, for all the sights and sounds by her beloved, from which she was now shut in, she thought this inward reluctance came. To punish herself for it she doubled her diligence, did as much again as was asked or expected of her, and made the Dufferin milliner more eagerly and widely sought after than ever.

She was not conscious that it was the keen delight

which she had experienced in the use of her higher faculties that now made the most delicate work of her hands seem poor and paltry by contrast. Nor did she know that somewhere far down in her soul there was a low, vague pain, which stirred with the accepted conclusion that the Boston publishers coincided entirely with herself in their estimate of her mental work. Worse still, the impartial committee of judges evidently were all of a like opinion. She was utterly honest in her own estimate of it. But it would be pleasant to have some one beside Evelyn differ from her on the subject. How pleasant! That difference would open for her, though ever so little, the enchanted kingdom of thought at whose gates she would fain stand, though she might never enter in. The world was behind her, the door of its delights, for her, forever shut. The love of man for her was not, and could never be more. If she had no place amid the lowliest in the kingdom of the mind, poor she was indeed.

In March she sent away her "*Basil: A Boy.*" It was past midsummer now, and she had not received a word concerning his fate. She had ceased to expect any word. Weeks before, her imagination saw the pretty manuscript book, which she made fair with such infinite pains, cast into the waste-basket. A tiny waif amid an endless mass whose every unit was more perfect than her own, its fate was inevitable. She knew it from the beginning, but she was sorry just the same. It was inexpressibly foolish, she was sure, yet how could she help loving this boy — this boy born equally of heart and brain? But she had no right to expect anybody else to love him. "I do not expect it. I

never expected it," she said, humbly. Yet away down in her heart all the time there was an ache for that boy. This same heart gave a leap every time Jim Dare appeared with the mail, for many weeks after the departure of the precious package.

It was impossible for one so inexperienced in its ways, to realize the exigencies of a publishing office, or the inevitable delays attendant upon the reading, acceptance, or returning of thousands of manuscripts. For weeks Agnes was sure of some answer. When she had ceased entirely to expect a reply, one came. It was in late August. She had reached the Pinnacle at last, for her summer rest. Vida was playing in the grass with Snowball, her own cosset lamb. Agnes and Evelyn were sitting on the door-step one Saturday evening, when Jim Dare emerged from the woods, mounted on John, and riding up to the door placed in Agnes' hand a consequential-looking letter. She opened it, and the first thing that met her astonished eyes was a check for one hundred dollars. She then read:—

BOSTON, *August*, 18—.

ULM NEIL:

DEAR SIR, — It affords us pleasure to inform you that after a patient and impartial examination of over one hundred MSS. (chiefly from ladies) the committee have chosen "Basil: A Boy," as distinctively worthy of the first prize. The amount, one hundred dollars (\$100), by check we now inclose, which please acknowledge.

No one but a man with the heart of a boy could so utterly have entered into the boy nature and life. Hop-

ing that the sales of this charming little book will warrant us in opening future negotiations with its author, we remain

Very truly yours,

BLANK, BLANK & Co.

Agnes was so agitated that the letter dropped from her shaking hand, as she read the last line.

"Oh, Evelyn!" she exclaimed. "I pray God to forgive my ingratitude of distrust. After all, after all, they have taken my story! It seems too much to believe. But it is true, for here is the hundred dollars!"

"Didn't I tell ye? I knowed it all the time. I was sure on it," said Evelyn, forgetting all her later misgivings in the recollection of her early faith. "I told ye so, you blessed child!" and she snatched Agnes to her heart.

"My mamma ain't a chile!" cried Vida from aloft, where she stood perched on the shoulders of the shouting Jim, who received the fact of the book, and especially of the hundred dollars, as quite a family affair.

"Your ma has written a book!" he exclaimed, exultingly. "Will you ever write un, little queen?"

"No," piped the small sovereign. "Don't like books. Them's hard."

"Not a book 'bout a boy. I heerd y'ur ma read it. 'Twus jest as plain as *a b ab*. She's got a hundred dollars for it. What air you goin' to git, baby?"

"A baby for my own se'f, with eyes so," blinking her own. "My baby hain't dot no eyes," in tones of woe, as she struggled downward to inspect the mysterious bit of paper that was to procure her her longed-for idol. Evelyn took her into her arms.

"Your ma has writ a book," she exclaimed with unabated delight. "What does baby think on't?"

"Nuffin," replied Vida with an imperial air. "My mamma will write more books, an' buy me a houseful of dolls with eyes so, an' a bell for Snowball, an' me a boo fock."

Agnes had disappeared. She might have been found inside of her own shut door, kneeling by her bed with her face buried in it, just as she knelt years before, when she prayed for grace to subdue the overpowering emotions of her own heart. Her prayer now was the overflow of loving gratitude. Her heavenly Father was good to her beyond all her doubts and all her fears, and oh, how far beyond her deserts! This thought filled all her consciousness. "What shall I render unto Thee!" she said in silence. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer. So much of power as Thou givest me, of love, of insight, of help, I now do dedicate to the poor, to the afflicted, to the struggling, the lonely, the sorrowful of thy creatures, so far as I may reach them, everywhere. So help me, O Thou God and Father of my spirit."

In September, Agnes went back to Miss Buzzill, and to her little shop at the Corners. But Dufferin, to its prolonged lamentation, that autumn wore the last bonnet fashioned by her hands. It did not forget her when she ceased to serve them.

Stella Moon, a young woman of an inquiring mind, who attended at the post-office and brought the immense weight of her curiosity to bear upon the unrav-

elling of all the family secrets of the municipality, whose position was most favorable to the pursuit of such knowledge, and whose opportunities and talents were generously devoted to the detailing of Dufferin news of the most private and sacred character, — informed the mourners for bonnets that were not, that Jim Dare had taken from the post-office more than one letter directed to "Mr. Ulm Neil," which she knew as well as she wanted to was for Madame Darcy; and that one of them contained a check or draft or bank-bill. She was certain, for she saw it when she held the letter up in a strong light and looked through it. If Madame Darcy was the recipient of drafts and bank-bills under any name whatsoever, of course it was unnecessary for her to make Dufferin bonnets in order to procure means of support.

The only unsatisfactory phase of the fact, and the unsolved mystery of it, was that Madame Darcy did not choose to spend that money in living on Dufferin Street, but still persisted in burying herself and that beautiful child ten miles from a post-office, in the wilderness at Tarnstone Pinnacle, and abiding in a log house with a woman who had always been a servant. No information imparted by Stella Moon could explain these unexplainable facts, nor ever could unless she opened the letters of Ulm Neil as well as looked through them.

This lack of knowledge on the subject, accurate and demonstrated, was painful to the Dufferin mind, but what cut it to the heart was that it was never again to wear "a Darcy bonnet." "The middle people" went back to the Lake, "the quality" to Montreal, to Lon

don, or to Boston, with their custom. Miss Buzzill shut up her shop, doffed her canary bonnet, and went into mourning. "My fifth cousin is dead," she said, "but 'tain't that; I've no courage to wear yaller, if 'tis plain an' stiddy, when my feelin's ain't in keepin'; never wus so upshot in my life."

The books of the Dufferin Bank showed that she was several hundred pounds the richer for having opened her shop the second time. But to have to close it just as it was beginning to make her "fortin" would have been an aggravation to any business body; but how could it fail to be a double one to a poor soul who, according to her weigher and measurer, Evelyn Dare, carried a "bump" of acquisitiveness on her head "as big as a turkey's egg"? Mixed with her grief at the loss of money was grief for the loss of the mother and child who, together, in her sterile life, had been much to love.

"Little yaller-headed tot! Ef I could only see her runnin' round ag'in 'twould be a comfort, I du declare. I've a feelin' for all young uns. But I couldn't have quite sech a feelin' fur *her* if her hair warn't yaller, yaller as golden-rod alongside of the road. Jest like Tom Dare's when he went to spellin'-school along o' me. He liked me *then*. I'm sure on't; an' he'd 'a' liked me still, ef she hadn't 'a' come along with them dancin' eyes o' her'n; an' she knows it, tu, an' she's never forgiven me that he liked me once — alwus a-peckin' away at me. Deary me! What hev I? Not even my bunnit shop! But I hev more money than one on 'em thinks fur, or ever will; an' every cent shall go tu that blessed little yaller head. I thought of young Tom Dare, but

I can't: he looks too much like *her*. When I coax little yaller-head's ma to let her come to the Street to school, I'll hev su'thin' to comfort me, I guess."

Many were the pilgrimages that she made to the Pinnacle. "Jest a sight of little tot does me good, if I do hev to stan' an' take a rakin' to pay fur it," she said, alluding in her remark to Evelyn's criticisms; "picking" at Miss Buzzill being an undoubted pastime of her old-time rival. But the victim thought herself richly rewarded for any infliction, when she bore away "little yaller-head" for a few days' visit at the Corners, as she often did.

"I shall never send her to school while I can teach her what she ought to learn, myself, and when I must, I shall go with her," said Agnes, in answer to Miss Buzzill's entreaties. Nevertheless a tender pity in her heart for the lonely woman made the mother often share her child-treasure with her.

Could Stella Moon have imparted to Dufferin womanhood the exact sum in the letter on which their favorite bonnet-maker had retired into the wilderness, "to live on it," as they supposed, they would have been very much astonished and considerably disgusted. "The fortune from home," about which their imagination played, was a pittance much smaller than the profit of bonnet-making would have been for a single season; nevertheless it was sufficient to provide for her child's and her own wants for several months, while she employed her energies upon more congenial tasks.

It was during the Christmas holidays that Agnes received from Blank, Blank & Co. a letter which decided what her work for the coming year was to be

It was a business letter, personally gracious, **positively** a "feeler," yet delightfully non-committal. It admitted that "Basil : A Boy" was having "a fair sale," sufficiently fair indeed to induce them to propose to Ulm Neil that he use the same insight, sympathy, and delineating power which he had expended on boy-life and a boy, in characterization of a more complex sort ; in depicting men and women in their interplay upon each other, while held together by a net-work of interesting circumstances. The power displayed in the embodiment of "Basil : A Boy" indicated subtler and acuter power in reserve, waiting encouragement and a subject to reveal itself in complete manifestation and assured success. Therefore Blank, Blank & Co. would venture upon a few suggestions. Then followed "hints" for one of those impossible books wherewith the best of publishers are fain to drive their authors stark mad in advance, at the bare thought of producing. This one being the joint product of a trinity of heads as inconglomerate as so many repelling metal balls, all striking toward a common centre of success, but by a route distinct and constitutionally opposite.

Mr. Blank One wanted a book "racy, strong, smacking of the soil, strikingly original." Mr. Blank Two wanted a story of common life told in an *uncommon* way, the opposite of commonplace, though entirely devoted to common things. He wanted every sentence filled with delicate touches, so delicate yet so astonishing that unawares they would take the reader's breath away, and when he caught it again the first use that he would make of it would be to say, "Nobody ever said such an uncommon thing before about such a common thing."

Mr. Blank Two thought well of Ulm Neil, but by no means so well as did Mr. Blank One. There were whole pages in "Basil: A Boy" that bore internal evidence of having been written when the writer was very tired indeed. They were languid, discouraged, tame. He really could not understand how his senior saw a success so surely in a second venture from the same hand. But he must warn Mr. Neil against tameness, minute description, and tell him to be sure to speak of common things in an uncommon way, if he intended to make an incisive mark in the world of letters.

Mr. Blank Three coincided with Mr. Blank One. There were indications — mind, he claimed "nothing more than indications" — in this first book of a far higher level of power which the writer might attain in a second, if he chose. These indications he mentioned without the slightest exaggeration. Then if they were never fulfilled, his colleagues would be moved to a less emphatic "I told you so." He did not agree with his colleague in the type of book most sure to bring in substantial rewards to the firm of Blank, Blank & Co. He wanted a book at once "spicy," "piquant," "brilliant," "fascinating;" a "mirror of society," "full of incident," yet in no vulgar sense "sensational;" in fine, the American novel of the generation. He wished to be sure that Mr. Ulm Neil was left in no mist whatever concerning what Mr. Blank Three desired from his pen.

Then the impalpable "Co.," with ethereal nose in the air, spoke his piece. In his tastes and sensibilities, not to mention his mind, he had nothing in common with realism in literature. He could truthfully remark that

he despised it. In nine instances out of ten, realism was simply literalism. Fiction was the realm of romance. The House were aware that he failed to see in Ulm Neil anything which its other members saw. Surely he was not a creator; he was not an inventor; he was not even a revelator; he was simply a copyist, using other people's pigments. "Basil: A Boy" might do for a boy of an ichorous sort. The hand that limned him could never paint a man par to the gods, or a woman aerial as Undine, the only types meet to live in ideal literature. He had nothing to suggest to a writer who would never surpass elemental lines, or the crudest forms of material character; who would never soar above the dead level of every-day things. In the desire of the House to obtain a second book from such a writer he acquiesced with the House, but he wished the House to observe it was not without protest; and he would further remark that an ambitious book from so crude a pen, in his opinion, would prove to the House a dead failure.

The result of this combined conference of Blank, Blank & Co. went into the letter that penetrated the log-house at the Pinnacle. Considering the opposite elements of opinion which entered into it, it is not strange that it seemed doubly cautious and devoid of all positive praise, even for a publishers' letter. Nevertheless it contained a certain request for an impossible book — a book not sensational, yet thrilling with sensation; a book real, yet equally ideal; a book uncommon about common things; a book with wings to soar into the empyrean of romance; a book furthermore piquant, pathetic, witty, humorous, spicy, brilliant, taking, read

able, absorbing, and, beyond and above everything, a book that would be certain to sell.

"I cannot write such a book," replied Agnes simply to these formidable Blanks, whom she had never seen, but whose supposed images made her quake. "I am not certain at all that I can write any book that men and women will care to read, but I can try. I am not at all sure that I can 'tell a story,' but I know that I can tell the truth. If you wish me to do so I will begin at once, and call it, 'The Annals of a Quiet City.'"

On the receipt of this letter from Ulm Neil, the senior publisher went and took a fresh look at the accounts of "*Basil: A Boy*," and then on his own responsibility, and out of the faith in his individual soul, just refreshed and made stronger, surely, by a glance at his cash account, he wrote to Ulm Neil: "Go on and write just what is in you — out; be sure of that; then I'll be sure, when you get it done, to sell fifty thousand copies of your book. Pin this up before you, and look at it when you get discouraged — as you will. Everybody does, that has anything in his head and heart worth getting out. If it's worth anything, it is bedded deep, and the getting it out is not so easy. You are a queer sort of a man, to feel that there is an adverse mind against you in this House. Never mind. I am its head, and you are my trump, as the 'Adverse' will yet find out. Think of me, not of him; of your copyright, of your fifty thousand books sold, and you will go ahead — you can't help it."

If there were more publishers like Mr. Blank One, there would be more successful books to make the publishing heart happy and the publishing pocket plethora

Many a flower of genius has perished in its faint opening, and never grown to blossoming, because of the blighting and freezing air in which it tried to live, and by which it was doomed to die. Even the inspirational faith of Mr. Blank One could not make Ulm Neil a rapid writer. She felt too intensely, observed too minutely, compared too closely, thought too deeply and comprehensively, to produce swift results in embodied forms. Now for the first time she learned the true significance of the lonely and silent hours of her past, when with a sleeping child in her arms, or when shut away by weakness or sickness from the society of others, she had studied and thought and fed the springs of knowledge from whence, for the first time, she now began to draw for the help of her fellows.

Yet it was not because she had unconsciously trained her faculties that she now wrote. She could write because she had lived ; because she had escaped no human experience which could help toward her development as a complete woman. As such, without knowing it, she now took her place in the race. Love, loss, faith, insight, sympathy, beauty, pity, suffering, solitude, silence, — out of these deep wells she drew for the world's healing. The common people received her gladly. They heard her voice and loved it. They came at her call, and were refreshed and nourished by her hand. She grew to be a power felt afar, not because she was great, but because she was consecrated ; because she knew her kind and loved them, and ministered to their unvoiced needs ; because she wrought with no thought of fame, but with a never-ceasing yearning to serve her generation.

Was it always easy? Deep as her humanity was her womanhood. She knew now why woman has left so few enduring monuments built by her intellect to her own sex and name. Compared with man, what faint pleasure she takes in the pure use of her faculties. From the beginning she invites her affections; rather, they invite her. This only in the milder-natured woman. In the stronger, with the slightest lack of moral force, how often have reason and even conscience been overwhelmed. Yet with few exceptions is it not in her emotional nature that she chooses to live and to have her being? She knew it now, this woman in her solitude, distilling the very life of life for her kind, who knew not even that she lived; she knew it now, the utmost cost of the head to the heart. She knew by what price of anguish to that heart she had risen to the absolute command of her faculties. Now she had no mental force that was not available. Each one did her bidding, moving to the unyielding discipline of necessity and will.

Deep down in her heart was there no resisting medium? no force in revolt, disturbing the perfect equipoise of mental balance? Yes, it was there, the unquenchable after-thought, half consciousness, half sensation, wholly pain, the after-thought which has slain its millions. The very strain upon life involved in her saying, "I will forget it; I will ignore it; I will live as if I felt it not!" was life-destroying. With all her bravery of effort and of will, did not this after-thought underlie and vein all that she felt, all that she saw, all that she did? Amid her most cherished task it suddenly confronted her, and lo! the very power of en-

deavor was gone. For the time she was conscious of nothing save that she was face to face with her sorrow, the sorrow which no one could measure, which the world would never divine. When the laughter of her child was the gladdest, when the long note of the whistling thrush, floating out to her from the depths of the woods, was the sweetest and the saddest, — how her heart would vibrate and ache beneath the smiting hand of memory !

No less the brain-task went on. The letter of Mr. Blank One was pinned before her on the wall. She must not fall short of his expectation because her heart ached. What if it did ache? Was not that life? All of life to many! Should she shrink from her share? The brain, the hand, should go on. Yet there were moments, though rare, when the head fell, when the hand grew still, when the woman said: "I cannot go on." When she first beheld herself as elected to loneliness for life, the realization was bitter. Yet of the cumulated dreariness of such days at that time she had no comprehension. To contemplate life in advance and in the aggregate is one thing; to bear life moment by moment, through emptiness, silence, loss, regret, pain, is another and much harder thing. She had many consolations. The mother-earth was her minister and comforter. In this solitude she had found true hearts to cherish her. But when the last good night was said, when the last kiss to her child for the day had been given, when the last word of comfort for some distant, unknown heart had been written, and she sat in the stillness of the night stirred only by the wind rushing through the fir-forest without; then through all

her gratitude penetrated the consciousness that amid kindness and affection, in the ultimate sense she was unutterably alone. Then, with anguish irrepressible, she beheld the life of love that she had missed, that was never to be here.

CHAPTER XXVL

SUCCESS?

It was not the actual man who had just gone from her life that she mourned. It was the man that he should have been, for whom she cried. In his fading out she had lost the absorbing thought of her life. A portion of herself seemed to have been struck from her, to be drifting farther and farther from her, out somewhere upon the face of the earth. She often unaware held her hand tight over her heart, as if to stop its aching for what it had lost. This loss was not the real man now sundered from her. It was for her lost faith, for sympathy and accord of soul, the consummate crown of all human companionship, that her nature called. Without these no human life could be complete. Yet it was these, the very reward of being, that she had missed. They were not hers, they could never be hers; yet her life went on. But if she had never comprehended to the utmost what a human life in the fulness of its multiform being could be; if she had had a less keen realization of what had escaped herself of its most potential sweetness; if she had not learned that hardest of all lessons, to endure in patience, to grow in the graces of the spirit.— not in the repletion of happiness, but through loss and dearth and want, through loneliness and sorrow of heart, yet no less through love

and faith and ever-kindling hope, — she would have been poor indeed. She would have had nothing to give, whereas she now gave bounteously of soul-wealth to her kind. She poured forth of her largess without stint. Nevertheless the heart within her ached and yearned even while it gave.

She ministered and would not cease ; but in her utmost need who was there to minister to her ? No one. She never asked this question. But no less the want was there, and the hope, though she was scarcely conscious of it, that sometime, — perhaps in the dim Hereafter, yet sometime, — he whose right it was would return to her, redeemed from the infirmities of flesh and spirit, to bind up the bleeding heart that loved him with the faith that it had lost and that lived again. This hope received a heavy shock one day. It came in a letter from **Mary Ben**, in the shape of a newspaper notice, an official announcement of a plea for divorce on the part of Cyril King from his wife Agnes King, on the ground of desertion. The defendant was summoned in behalf of her own interests to appear by such a date, else the plaintiff's suit would proceed and the divorce be granted to him.

"My mind is twisted this way and that," wrote Mary Ben. "I am that troubled to know what is best — to send you this notice or to keep it. My captain says 'tis my duty as your true friend to send it, as I do. If it can only bring you back to us in peace and happiness, I shall never be sorry ; but that, I am afraid, is not to be, though Lotusport can never be what it was once to me, without you."

"Defend her own interests !" Drag the bitter truth

which had desolated her heart and life before the world's eyes for its inspection and cruel comment, while the waste of happiness, the wreck of life, remained? Never. She would put no plea against his desire. What that desire was she was all too sure for her own peace. If she were mistaken, would he have made no effort in all these months to discover the retreat of his wife and child? That he had made no such effort she had every reason to believe, if only from the letters of Mary Ben. Her home was rented to strangers, and her husband never spent a day in Lotusport that the exigencies of public business did not demand. She could endure, but she could not fight against fate. The divorce must go on. This was indeed the end. Once her husband, always her husband. He could never be less to her faithful soul. Nevertheless, to the world she had already ceased to be his wife. At last she had lost not only him, but hope. At last in extremity she was alone; alone as she had never felt herself to be before.

The only visible sign of this interior desolation was the whiter face, the swifter hand. The spring came, the summer waxed and waned, the autumn blazed and died, the northern winter piled its inviolate snows, — and the heart within her had never made another outward sign of its inward life.

Meanwhile, even to the log-house within the forest beside the Pinnacle had penetrated the eager questioning of the reading world concerning "Ulm Neil." "Who is Ulm Neil?" This was the latest conundrum put forth in the realm of letters. Like other conundrums, its interest deepened proportionately with

the difficulty of its solution. Many persons "knew as well as they wanted to" just who Ulm Neil was; but nobody was sure. "Ulm Neil was a man." "Ulm Neil was a woman." Ulm Neil was an already well-known author who chose to put forth this remarkable series of stories now published in a book called "The Annals of a Quiet City," under a new signature, that their revelations of life and character might not be traced to a definite source. "Ulm Neil was a man of fortune and leisure, who chose to give his observations of gay life and fashionable society *incog.*" "Ulm Neil was a young woman, self-educated, who had not escaped the sting of maligning tongues nor the cruel probings of poverty, herself; as her abiding and tender sympathy with the poor, the wronged, and the sorrowing, which made the very atmosphere and aroma of her enchanting genius, proved beyond cavil," said an enthusiastic reviewer of youthful years, who on the strength of this faith addressed her a private communication through her publishers, in it informing her that "his own personal experience had been of a like character; that he felt an irresistible conviction that his soul was bound to the soul of Ulm Neil by mysterious cognate ties that time would prove indissoluble; that their destinies were coeval; that he awaited breathlessly till he should see his conviction attested by the divine seal of her own inspirational words;" in short, he waited an answer. This was but one of hundreds of personal letters which from every direction out in the world now met on the little table in the quaint log-house at the Pinnacle. There were men who wanted wives, and who were sure, by the delicate and touching

revelations of feminine character made by Ulm Neil, that Ulm Neil was the mortal who could lead them to their ideals, which they had long been searching for but never yet had found. There were women who wanted to tell their sorrows, to pour out their aspirations; women who wanted sympathy, women who wanted help, women who wanted love; women whose hair was gray and whose day was almost done, and young girls who wanted to be told the sunniest way to the fulness of love and happiness.

Through the mass of egotism, conceit, and foolishness, how often the unfeigned cry of the human penetrated her heart. What could she do? Alas! how little to appease the never-satisfied want, to still the never-ceasing plaint. A word of sympathy, of help, of cheer, was all it was in her power to give; how futile it was to relieve the stress of so much supplicating need! In the humility of helplessness she took on the yoke of success. What was any pang of her own but a tiny pulse in the universal aching heart? She bore the griefs and carried the sorrows of her kind. She could pity, cheer, and soothe, but she could not save. Because she could not she felt weighted with the burdens of many.

Her letters were addressed to "Miss Ulm Neil," to "Mrs. Ulm Neil," to "Mr. Ulm Neil," and one to "Ulm Neil, Esquire." This one made an emphatic impression, partly because it bore the address of Dufferin, partly because of its tone, and partly because of its writer. He was the only one of these many letter-writers whom she had ever seen. As she read the name, "Athel Dane," the image of a sombre-faced

young man rose before her, leading her sunny-faced little girl by the hand, just as he appeared once in the open door of Miss Buzzill's shop. Vida, pursuing a butterfly, had run far down the street, where panting and discomfited, for the butterfly had flitted far above her childish reach, she was found just inside the church-yard fence by the Reverend Athel Dane, as he was starting to take his afternoon ride. Anything half as pretty as that yellow-haired little girl he had never seen inside of that church-yard fence. Flushed with running and tearful with disappointment, she was full of confidence and eager to be comforted. She had lost her butterfly, she had run away, and her mamma was up to the Corners. Whereupon Athel Dane, instead of going for his horse, took the little girl by the hand and led her back to her mother. Agnes, looking up from her work in an inner room, saw framed in the outer door the youthful but solemn face of a man (an unusual sight in the door of Miss Buzzill's shop), and in the same instant Vida's piping voice began to send forth little panting puffs of story. Agnes rose to receive her child from the hand of a stranger who with cold countenance but perfect breeding told where he had found her little girl, and, barely waiting to receive thanks, departed. She had never seen him since, though while she stayed at Dufferin she certainly heard the name of the young rector on feminine lips oftener than any other.

Here was a letter from him to "Ulm Neil, Esquire." He said in this letter "that when he became conscious of owing a debt, he could not make himself easy until he paid it. He was certainly a debtor to the writer

of 'The Annals of a Quiet City.' He rarely troubled himself with new authors, especially the writers of stories, their books being the very opposite of his usual line of reading. Indeed, it was quite by accident that he took up 'The Annals of a Quiet City,' in a bookstore. For the mines of human experience which it revealed, the types of human character which it embodied, above all for the strong yet tender help which it rendered to all upward-reaching souls, he thanked the writer. One quality in the book he could not analyze, while he felt it as a fascination: this was its atmosphere of familiarity, a haunting something like a look in the eyes of a stranger reminding one of a cherished and familiar friend. He felt rather than saw in some of these pages the vivid light and quickening atmosphere of his native North. There were touches, touches only, which seemed surely to indicate that the writer was familiar with the very scenes surrounding the reader while he read. Yet this was impossible. Nobody had ever dwelt at Dufferin who could have combined with suggestions of all its glorious outlying land such revelations of cosmopolitan character and experience. Only a man could have written it, for it was granted to man only to add to tenderness strength."

Sometimes with flushing cheeks, then with suffusing eyes, then with indifference, Agnes read, in the newspapers sent by her publishers, both the gracious and ungracious notices of her book. One would tell her that "Ulm Neil was all imagination;" another, that "Ulm Neil had no imagination at all." In one he was an idealist with little or no force of thought; in another

he was a realist, and his worse than pre-Raphaelite strokes were mere copies of literal life. She found Ulm Neil both unappreciated and over-praised. Perhaps three "notice" writers in a hundred had really read the book with sufficient leisure and interest to receive its spirit, to quicken to the humanity thrilling through it, to perceive its mental quality, and to judge it justly both in what it reached and in what it failed to reach.

Because it was born of life, it lived. To her wonder that which was most living in it, which touched life most nearly, was what the reviewers called "overwrought," and the most "untrue to actual experience." She knew now out of what travail of brain and soul and conscience a living book came; what will, what bravery, it cost to dare to tell the truth, to paint life as it is. How often the conscientiousness of a true artist, adhering to her ideal of truth as she perceived it, at any price to herself, had been the only support of her sinking spirit. From the first line to the last, not one word of faith and encouragement had come to her from any human source. Even Mr. Blank One failed her on the reception of the first chapter. He told her plainly that he was disappointed. He expected — he did not know what he expected; but "certainly something different." "He still hoped" (but with many doubts and many fears unmistakably) "to sell the fifty thousand copies; but to make this possible she must brighten up, and resume the sparkling style of 'Basil: A Boy,' which was simply perfect in its way."

Mr. Blank Two took the chapter to his home and

read it one evening to a circle of friends, critical and cultivated to an extreme degree. No one of them could create a work either of art or of inspiration, but they could mildly and maliciously tear both to pieces with a facility which amounted to genius. They conscientiously filtered forth a few drops of occasional praise to the unknown writer during the pleasant process of dissecting him, but Mr. Blank Two was scarcely conscious of these drops, and forgot them altogether when the next morning, from sheer nervousness, he reported to Ulm Neil every disagreeable word said by the guests of the evening before. The combined verdict was certainly unfavorable to the first "Annal of a Quiet City," it gave him great pain to say, but as the larger share of the work was still unwritten there was a chance for growth, for a development of the faculty of telling common things in an uncommon way,—a faculty which Ulm Neil did not yet command.

These were her publishers who held her in such poor esteem, and beyond them her fancy conjured up the voiceless but scornful image of the sublimated "Co.," with his nose in the air, waiting the loss and disappointment of "the House" as due retribution for its unwise trust in an untried writer. Her hand grew still, her brain cold and numb. She could not go on, not without one encouraging word, and in all the world there was not one human being to utter it. Yes, there was one. Evelyn begged her to read "jest a page," as they sat alone one evening. As Agnes read, Evelyn laughed and cried, grew wrathful and tender and silent. The written page moved Evelyn just as life

moved her, as she lived it hour by hour. Agnes went on. She never knew how or why; surely it was with no hope of reward, but no less with unconscious fidelity to the truth that was in her. Here was the response. Her book lived in the affections of the people because it was woven of the same tissue out of which their daily human life was made; yet wrought into purer, sweeter, nobler forms of experience than those to which they yet had grown; forms which they yearned and reached after, nevertheless.

The book sold well, if not wonderfully. Blank, Blank & Co. were satisfied. Agnes Darcy was gone and forgotten. Because she had lived, loved, suffered, and died to herself, Ulm Neil lived, strong, tender, not unto herself, but for every human being out on the lonely earth, hungering for sympathy, whom her great, helpful pity could reach. These were not Agnes' thoughts. She was thinking, before all this recognition how poor was the woman to whom it came. Admiration, homage, criticism, blame, held their due value in her mind, no doubt, but they were less than nothing to her yearning and unanswering heart. Her heart had never sought such rewards nor such a life. Desire had never painted it. The world might set its own value upon it—it belonged to the world. It had cost the woman too dear. What if the whole world were hers, and yet the life of her life, of her love, of her home, were not? She was still so poor that for such poverty the universe held no recompense. With these thoughts her eyes, glancing down the newspaper columns, rested upon this announcement:—

"A MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.

"In this city, on the 1st of October, at the residence of the bride, Murray Hill, by the Reverend O. Tristingbee, D. D., of the Church of the New Covenant, Circe, only child of the late Rothsay Sutherland, of Sutherlands, Louisiana, and Hon. Cyril King, M. C. Louisiana, Edinburgh, and Paris journals please copy."

She read this notice through once, twice, thrice, as she might have read it had she been asleep, with eyes open yet with suspended consciousness. Slowly the significance of what she read came to her comprehension.

"This is the woman who did not want my husband, who did not want to marry, who wanted her freedom, her kingdom, her subjects only; wanted his adulation, his homage, his subjugation, at any cost of honor, but not him! A year since the divorce! To the world she is his wife. Then what am I? I? I am dead. I am buried. I am forgotten. I am not, and as if I had never been, in his world. Yet in wifeness, in motherhood, I still live for him, for his child. Beyond all outward form, beyond the power of human law to annul, beyond the power of human treachery to destroy, I am his wife; I only, forever. I thank Thee, my God, that she is not, that she never can be, his wife!"

These words would have sounded like the raving of a wild woman to the gay denizens of Vanity Fair, who with fawning and flattering salute hastened to welcome back to the capital Circe Sutherland as the Hon. Mrs. King. The announcement of the marriage was more than a month old. In a later journal that Agnes me-

chanically took up, her eyes encountered, under the head of "Gay Life at the National Capital," an extended report of "a resplendent reception given by the Hon. Cyril King and Mrs. Sutherland King, on the opening for the season of their magnificent mansion at the West End." More than a column of a metropolitan journal was devoted to a description of the upholstery and furniture of this "palatial abode." All the adjectives of English speech were exhausted in portraying its curtains, cushions, and divans of coral and amber satin, of Gobelin and Aubusson tapestry; its velvet carpets; its inlaid floors; its salons paved with mosaics, its marvels of silver, gold, and glass; its furniture of malachite and ebony; its paintings; its statues from Rome; its carvings from Florence and Oberammergau; its laces from the looms of Saxony and the bobbins of Chantilly.

But the culminating "description," the one in which Jenkins surpassed even himself in inflated metaphors and fulsome flattery, was in the portraiture of this mansion's mistress: "Beautiful beyond the possibility of language to portray, or of eyes that had never beheld her dazzling loveliness to imagine, was this sumptuous woman, who had been the cynosure of worshipping eyes in the courts of Europe, and who had now begun her reign as empress supreme in the social realm of the Federal capital." Then followed a minute description of the dress worn by her at her first reception. "A robe of lace made in Scotland from her own designs, worn over yellow satin, while the rarest amber of Constantinople, the palest that ever a sorrowing peri wept, shed its soft lustre upon her lustrous neck and arma-

"The host, superb in health and manly beauty, witty fascinating, magnetic, looked a radiant god in happiness, as he stood the central sun of attraction, fairly dividing the homage of the occasion with his dazzling bride. A pair so *distingué* had not appeared at the national capital for a generation. Such wealth, wit, *esprit*, eloquence, elegance, beauty, and grace did not unite in one pair once in a century."

As Agnes finished this paragraph, how distinctly she saw the dome of the Capitol, white, stainless against the blue, as she saw it last; the Capitol itself on its emerald hill; the alcove in its library where she sat and listened to the beguiling voice that wrought her woe; the drawing-rooms at the West End beneath whose blinding lights she herself once stood, wherein she was now as utterly forgotten as if she had never made one in their splendid throngs. Now? She could touch the ceiling of the cramped room in which she sat. The tapestry on its walls was six-cent cotton. Not a picture frame that decked it ever cost a dollar; the most sumptuous article in it was her cane-seated rocking-chair. These cheap comforts, this small room even, were not her own. Earth did not hold an object really her own, — and he!

Vida laughed in her sleep. Nothing her own! She went and threw her arms around her child; was not she all her own? No woman was poor, no woman was alone, who could hold to her heart her breathing child, all, all her own. In having her, she had more than they. In her poverty she was richer than they were.

Did Mrs. Sutherland King, as her estates and her pride caused her to call herself, step at once to her

throne in the social kingdom without protest? Was no one brave enough to call her a pretender? to challenge her as a usurper of at least her newly attained name? Yes, the Hon. Mrs. Peppercorn was brave enough and honest enough to do both, and in a voice of no uncertain sound. There were a few, a very few, who, remembering "the first Mrs. King," as Agnes was now called, and remembering also that she was yet alive, somewhere in the world, regarded the presence of a second Mrs. King as a sin against the family state, and an offence against good society. True to their convictions, a truth not easily maintained amid the many conflicting interests of Capitolian life, they proved it upon every possible occasion by the pointed remark, "*We do not call upon Mrs. Sutherland King.*" But as thousands did, that conquering lady did not seem to receive even a chill from the "cold shoulder" of the righteous minority. Society cherished its own private opinion of Mrs. Sutherland King, a private opinion that was perpetually "leaking out" into public through the unguarded comments of the ten thousand dear friends who attended her receptions and balls, drank her champagne, ate her French dinners, waltzed in her magnificent *salle de danse*, and the next morning, in boudoir and parlor, with smiling malice picked her reputation to pieces by way of reward.

Stories of her past career casting deep shadow upon her womanhood, gathering exaggeration as they went, flew eagerly from lip to lip. Everything dubious was insinuated of her, if not asserted. Everybody questioned or distrusted her, even while they followed and flattered her; but because of distrust or even open ac

cusation, they did not flatter her or follow after her the less. No! to be able to show Mrs. Sutherland King's card of invitation, with its delicate tracery and ancient crest, was to prove yourself "not in society." Nor did this prove that the "moral tone" of the American capital was lower than is that of other cities of the world. Wealth, beauty, grace, wit, fascination, place, and power are potential forces the whole earth over. Without these, the concentrated purity of the entire human race would stand as a cipher to what is termed 'the gay world.' It was what Mrs. Sutherland King had, not what she had not, that the gay world wanted and took. It reserved to itself, however, its own inviolable right of "making remarks" during the pleasant process. Example: Scene, morning reception at the White House. Mrs. Sutherland King upon the arm of her distinguished-looking husband appears in the doorway of the Blue Room, and advances, while hundreds of eyes concentrate upon her, toward the Presidential circle. Very near it, a little to one side, hovers the Hon. Mrs. Peppercorn, exchanging running comments upon all she sees and hears, with her friend, Mrs. Midget.

"There's *that* woman!" she exclaims, with lowering brows.

"I do not call upon her," replies Mrs. Midget with elevated eyes.

"I *do*," responds the senatress, "though *first* I never would. With all her airs she is only a member's wife; nor that, by right or decency. My list is too long to admit of my running after members' wives (such a herd!) even if etiquette did not demand imperatively

that they should make the first call. In society I stand upon etiquette to the death, but not with my friends, as Mrs. Skinflint of I. does. *Her* bosom friend might die in the next room alone, if she hadn't made the first call. Mrs. Sutherland King made the first call. 'You see I accept the Washington code,' she said. I knew she accepted the necessity of propitiating *me*. Money and beauty are not everything, even in Washington. A good name and good behavior are not without value, even here. She knows my opinion of hers; that I'll never forgive her for her treatment of Mrs. King — *the only Mrs. King*. I know she was a poor-spirited little thing, and scarcely deserved the keeping of a husband when she wouldn't manage him any better. But to my dying day I shall never forget the look on her face at the ambassadors' ball; and I'm not going to try. Now look at *that* woman in *her* place already!"

Circe, all grace, in high beauty even under the searching chandelier, was dispensing smiles and word-music to the President, who was sufficiently entranced to make it necessary for the official usher to recall him from his lapse to hand-shaking and the throng.

"Look at her, Mrs. Midget!" groaned Mrs. Peppercorn in suppressed bass. "That woman never spoke to a man in her life without the fixed intention of making him fall in love with her."

"And she usually succeeds, does she not?" ventures Mrs. Midget.

"No indeed. All men are not Cyril Kings, thank Heaven! Mr. Peppercorn despises her, just as much as I do. I know it by his remarks."

"I doubt if wives can always tell whom their husbands depise or otherwise — by their remarks."

"Judge for yourself, not *me*, Mrs. Midget. I know that Mr. Peppercorn despises that woman as he should. I return her calls for one purpose only. If I see her and speak with her, I can give her many a dig that I never could if I didn't. I've one ready for her now. And she will find her way here in a moment, you see!"

"Making your usually astute observations on womankind? You don't take the trouble to judge men, I believe, Mrs. Peppercorn?" said Circe in the blandest tones, as she slipped through a little opening in the throng.

"You mistake me there. I comment on whatever I see, you may be sure of that. I see women plainer than men, for it was never *my* fashion to run after men. One is quite enough for me to manage."

"I agree with you, Mrs. Peppercorn. One is more than it's really worth one's while to manage. It's ever so much nicer to let even him go his way, and you go yours."

"I do not agree with you. It is much safer for Mr. Peppercorn to go *my* way; and pleasanter, he finds it."

"Doubtless. You have a genius for government I never had. Let me introduce you to the Marquise, the wife of the new Minister from France. I knew her in Paris. She is charming."

"Thank you;" and the senatress drew herself up till she looked inches taller. "I prefer to meet her first officially. I'm not one of the crowd who run and hawn about the Diplomatic Corps. They may be as

good as other people in their own countries, but they are not better than other people *here*, though as a rule they show plainly enough that they think they are. I will meet them half-way, but I never go after foreigners — nor anybody else."

"Let me bring the Marquise to you?" in the sweetest of unruffled tones. "You could not help loving her."

"I have more to love now than I can do justice to," said the implacable. "You remind me more and more of a character in 'The Annals of a Quiet City.' Have you read it yet?"

"Yes. A remarkable book; so quiet, and yet so full of human emotion and experience. I know whom you mean, Mrs. Peppercorn. I think, myself, she is like me; like what I would have been under the same conditions. It's a haunting kind of a book, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is. It is something better than I expected to hear at a morning reception, that it haunts you. I hope it will continue to haunt you."

"How kind of you! For it is like being haunted with the refrain of a song after the song has ceased. If it is half sad, it is delicious."

"It would not be delicious to me if I were in your place," Mrs. Peppercorn wanted to say; but even she felt compelled to keep within the bounds of insult if not of rudeness. Cyril King kept clear of Mrs. Peppercorn. He was chatting with the Marquise. In a moment more, all radiance still, Circe joined them.

That evening, amid her plants and cats in her little lilac-shaded cottage in old Ulm, Mrs. Twilight sat by her lamp, peering through her round spectacles down

the pages of a new book. Mrs. Twilight did not abound in new books. As a rule she did not care for them. She preferred her Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, and Young's "Night Thoughts," she believed, to all the new books in the world. Yet here was a new book which not only chained her attention, but made her heart, in the most unexpected and unprecedented manner, — her heart that had beat slowly and peacefully so many years as an old heart should, — now actually thrill and throb once more with the sweetest experience of youth. Something — what was it? — in the book, through all the dust of years, through all the dimness of the far past, seemed to touch and to make it live again.

"John Darcy!" and as she spoke his name a pink tinge touched her withered cheek. "John Darcy! Surely it is he! and I! We both are here. Not as we are now, the one old, the other glorified, but both beautiful with youth. Only one living being could make this picture — John Darcy's child. I see not a line to tell, but it was she who sent it to me, she who wrote it. I am sure, sure. May God love her and keep her in her great sorrow, wherever on this earth she may be! And if He would only let my old eyes see her face once more, I would praise his holy name!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DUFFERIN RECTOR.

THE Rev. Athel Dane, in his well-stored library, was looking over some books, to select one or two to take to a friend. The friend was a lady; and this reverend gentleman, like the rest of his kind, was always pleased to do his share toward the enlightenment of the feminine mind. He was early and profoundly impressed with its need of enlightenment, also with the hopelessness of the undertaking. No other class of educated men assume such an attitude of mental and spiritual arrogance toward women as clergymen. Doubtless their interpretation of the words of Saint Paul has much to do with it. A priest in that function addressing a woman rarely forgets that she belongs to a tribe under ban; that she is one who because of her sex alone is forbidden, he believes, by his favorite Apostle, ever to become a preacher, while he, elected by sex to teach *her*, feels the old Adam in him swell into grandeur at the very thought.

Athel Dane possessed the faults of his class to an extreme degree. Temperament and education combined to make him mentally and spiritually arrogant. He was a very young man for the place he filled. The responsibilities which came to him so early, which he met so manfully and fulfilled so well, made it impossible

that he should discern how much of human nature and of human life he had yet to learn which years and experience only could teach him. Surely he was not remarkable in this, that being very young he felt very old. Such a feeling is the inevitable indication of studious, poetic youth. He could scarcely be called poetic, but studious and thoughtful he had been from his earliest childhood. He had no recollection of the time when he felt young, and having studied always and attained to a scholarship in itself remarkable, it is not strange he should feel old and wise to a degree to which the mere years he had lived gave no warrant. That he should feel thus was perfectly natural, for his emotional nature had never been fully aroused, much less developed, and he was very ignorant of that lore of human experience which all the cloistered colleges of earth, all the theologies of all the ages, are inadequate to impart; whose teachers are love, suffering, self-abnegation, and whose final, consummate flower is the pure, lowly, and loving heart which through sympathy makes every sorrow of the race its own.

Such a heart did not beat in the breast of Athel Dane. His was a strong, true heart in its way; it beat resolutely for principles and opinions and classes. It was cold to all outside. The cry of the human for the human's sake had never penetrated, much less moved it to tender pity. Dufferin was proud of its minister but did not love him. He was in no sense a popular clergyman. Rather, he proved himself to be an exception to most young ministers in this, that he did not love his young lady parishioners, and they did not love him. It is true that he conscientiously tried to do his

duty to them all, to redeem their souls from the frivolity of their natures, but he did it with an unconscious mental and spiritual superciliousness which provoked their resentment.

When he came to the parish he was met by the usual feminine bombardment of embroidered slippers, dressing-gowns, and caps. He stood the siege without yielding an inch in any one direction, a fact for which Dufferin womanhood individually never forgave him. Each lady received in return for her gift a polite note of thanks, and a book: "The True Woman." Thus it happened that there were a hundred or more copies of "The True Woman" hidden away in manifold corners, each bearing the name of its owner with the "best wishes of her pastor." The second year of his stay in Dufferin the Rev. Athel Dane did not receive a single personal gift from a lady. It was not "The True Woman" as a personal present that any one objected to. What harrowed her soul was that she shared this "True Woman" with a hundred other women. Such unnatural indifference in a young man under twenty-five, and that young man a clergyman, could be accounted for only by the fact that still further back the Rev. Athel Dane had been ill-used by a woman. In other words, the Dufferin mind concluded that in his college days he had been jilted by a girl, which was reason sufficient why he should at present avoid, if not hate, all other girls.

One or both he assuredly did. In fact, he did only the former. He avoided young ladies not because he hated them, but because, as the inferior race of beings which he deemed them to be, they did not personally

interest him. He recoiled from any human relation which did not embody largely the element of companionship. What possibility of companionship was there in a creature whose energy of body and brain was all consumed by crocheting, Berlin wool, inane novels, and personal finery? This creature, woman, as she lived in his opinion and prejudice, aroused in him a sense of injury and even of resentment, of which he was not conscious. Mentally he blamed her severely for being what she was, even while he believed her constitutionally incapable of attaining to the highest heights in any direction. His sense of injury came from the conclusion in his own mind that woman as woman had never done anything for him. He acknowledged his need of her as a force in his being and life, even while he assumed her inadequacy to supply it. Because she was what she was, his nature stood alone, his sympathies ran low, his heart was apathetic, his affections dry as dust: this was his deliberate conclusion, arrived at with an indolent bitterness.

A very young man who felt very old, he was like all men at least in this, that while he believed his virtues to be all his own, his failures he thought were caused by other people. It was true that in life and character he owed little to women. Losing his mother in babyhood, he grew through childhood the pet, plaything, and butt of an aunt, shallow in brain, weak in purpose, but mighty in hysteria. With divided tenderness and fury she took care of him. He never ceased to be grateful to her for such love as she had given him, but all his gratitude was veined with a sense of pity and contempt for her character. It was but natural that

he should now feel old, for it seemed to him that he had never been young. As he looked back he knew that he emerged too early from a wretched boyhood, conscious of a fearful lack in his life if not in his nature, and filled with wonder that he lived at all. The only explanation which he could find to so unsatisfactory an existence was in the certainty of another. He grew to a sure faith of the life to come, and in contemplating the fulfilments of its fair thereafter, he found the only sufficing solution to the imperfect days which now tantalized him, troubled him, yet inspired him ever to aspiration and endeavor, whose fruition waited far beyond their horizon.

His favorite theme was the future life as a continuation, and sequence, and reward of the present one. His sermons on this subject had given him his reputation as a preacher. When he preached of the everlasting life as an influence and an inspiration in this unsatisfying and transitory one; of the husbandhood and wifehood, the fatherhood and motherhood, too divine to be reached in fading outward forms, to be realized there in types of life full and sweet beyond our conception, through the working on of the perfect law of the hereafter, he was strong, vivifying, uplifting to all who hearkened. But when he attempted to deal with human life as we find it, with the daily struggle of men and women in the ruck and shard of every day he was weak. He was perhaps too keenly conscious of the incompleteness of every human relationship, every human effort; but of the long process of pain, disappointment, failure, submission, from whence such unsatisfying results grow, he knew but little from ob

servation, and less from experience. He had not lived long enough for that. In his strictures upon human life and relationships he proved that he was very young.

The study of theology, divine as it is in the abstract, if filtered through half-experiences, and applied by a mind concentrated and prejudiced, often warps and belittles it to a painful degree. Athel Dane's theology helped to hold him a blameless man, no doubt, but it had failed to make him a nobler one. He had never tested it in any stress of soul, such as may overtake one in the clash and clamor of the world, or in some silent strait of the inward life, when the very foundations of being seem to collapse and to sink from under one. He was too familiar for his own amiability with the frets, worries, and gnat-like exasperations of daily existence ; but to the isolated sorrow which smites to crush the soul, or to prove the utmost test of its spiritual strength, as it soars above it purified and exalted, he was a stranger.

He was a natural student. The various languages which he knew unlocked to him the lore of many races, and of the dim elder ages. His life was in his books, in his thoughts and theories, and in the elemental world in whose contact only he felt somewhat of the rush of freedom, strength, and power which belonged to the primeval man. This unity with natural forces had so fed the sources of manful life that Hebrew roots, Greek particles, and juiceless theology combined had failed to dry them up. The conflicting forces of his nature had never been reconciled. It was full of sharp contrasts which needed a potent harmonizer to bring forth symmetry of character

In contact with others he seemed self-assured beyond the possibility of receiving help from any human being, yet in secret he sighed over his inward inadequacy to extract a sense of peace from all his combined powers. His temperament seemed out of tune with that of almost every one whom he met. Nobody seemed to be necessary to him, yet in the silence of his soul he felt a sense of human loneliness which he himself did not understand. If he felt an unfeigned pleasure in thinking of the fulfilments of the world to come, he felt no less an ever-present under-protest against the incompleteness of the tangible world in which he moved and had his being. His nature was at war against itself. Thus far not even "grace" had reconciled its inward discords or wrought through pain and sacrifice into living experience the sweet fulfilment of the gospel of peace. When he turned his back on his problems and polemics, and mounted on his powerful steed rode forth to the vastness of the plains, and the grandeur of the mountain-tops, he reached his highest ultimatum of strength and of content. In such moments his being gained an equilibrium. Nature was centripetal to the man. She drew him toward herself in full accord. No alien thought could drive them asunder.

Thus he thought after a gallop out of Dufferin one day, as he dropped the reins idly and allowed his horse to walk on at its leisure. After riding up and down high hills and through narrow valleys for ten miles and more, he had gained a lofty plateau. Far below him was the cultivated vale with its farm-houses, its yellow fields, its groves of sugar maple with their banners of

crimson, gold, and green burning in the September sunshine. Far away on its lofty plain stretched the stately expanse of Dufferin Street, its distant spires sending forth a far-off gleam. Still beyond, three distinct ranges of mountains rose in succession, the farthest notching with deep sapphire the pale azure of the sky. Between them, two lakes had cast down their shields, their sheen flashing through the open gates of the nearer hills. Ten miles distant were the stone mansions and ambitious spires, the thrifty cottages, the small trade, the idle tattle of Dufferin Street, that repeated all the world of men and women in miniature. About him were the log-houses of the pioneers, smouldering amid their scanty fields and grazing herds; before him stretched the native forest, the topmost stings of the firs piercing the air like the needles of innumerable spires, while giant maples and elms met in mid-air, like a minster dome.

Impatience, weariness of what he had left behind, rather than any longing for the solitude before him (for he was always solitary), seemed vaguely to propel him onward. His closely observant faculties took in all around him, while through his unrestful soul stole a consciousness of peace. After the dust and prying eyes of Dufferin Street, it was a restful relief, this narrow forest road, as silent of human voices as if mortal had never entered it, yet all interpenetrated with the pervading music of the universe. The bough of a beech-tree brushed his face, yet the squirrel on it, blinking and nibbling the nut in its hand, did not move from its perch. A partridge hopped slowly across the road, and the near stride of the horse's feet did not

cause him to hop a pulse faster. The desire to destroy, instinct in the original man, rose quick and eager in the pulses of Athel Dane at the sight of such game. "Why didn't I bring a rifle!" he exclaimed involuntarily, for the instant losing the priest in the man, and forgetting that the sight of a shooting minister with a gun would have set all Dufferin agog.

"I have no natural life," said youth and manhood half bitterly to the priest. The next instant the Rev. Athel Dane wondered how he could make such a remark even to himself. He came to the end of the woods, to behold to his astonishment on one side a remarkable sight — a field of ripe wheat rippling in the sun, a grassy meadow, a crystal spring, a log-house covered with crimsoning vines, a small, dark lake fringed with willows, and an abrupt precipice with firs, silver birches, and fluttering poplars flinging their green and gold about its bastions and battlements, while it thrust a scarred and castellated summit far up into the air. He paused and gazed upon the scene. It seemed born of utter isolation and perfect peace. The log-house was alone with nature. More, it seemed itself but an outgrowth of the earth, and as if in tint and bloom it had been almost resumed back to its original elements. As lowly as any he had passed, it wore an ideality of aspect which a moment before he would have believed impossible of such a structure. It was opulent in fruit and bloom. It smiled amid its ungathered harvests as if from a cradle of plenty. It bore an aspect of prosperity remarkable in such a place, and in a region where poverty and privation were the rule. It would be the result only of the most intelligent thrift ;

but it was touched with a grace born of a quality beyond mere intelligence, a love of beauty cultivated and refined into artistic forms.

These conclusions of Athel Dane were arrested by a faint human sigh. It was not a sigh of grief, but of relief. A little girl had been gazing upon him so long with suspended breath that now she was obliged to catch it again or to relinquish it altogether. As he heard the sigh Athel Dane turned his head suddenly, impatiently almost, to think that even here he was not alone ; but in the same breath a thrill of pleasure stirred his heart. There on the edge of the wood, surrounded by ferns and mosses and vermilion-mottled leaves which she had gathered, and which she was now weaving into wreaths and crosses, sat a little girl — the same, though grown and changed, that Athel Dane found in his church-yard and led to her mother years before. Few objects of personal interest came into his life for him to remember, and she had lived in his memory as an exceptionally beautiful child. He inquired after her once, to learn that she was the child of the village milliner, of whose brief artistic reign in Dufferin not even he was ignorant, and that she vanished with her mother, whither he did not take the trouble to ask ; yet there had been moments more than once when the vision of the child came back, and he felt a vague half-longing to see her again. Perhaps there was no more touching proof of the poverty of the man's affectional life than that he remembered this child with a half-sigh of regret. That was years before. He had not thought of her for a long time. Yet here she was in the heart of this solitude. That she had been gazing upon him in silence, that she remembered him, her conscious face betrayed.

"Do you know me, little maid?" he asked with a swift smile which could be enchanting, it broke so like sudden light out of darkness.

"Yes, sir; you are the rector from Dufferin. You took me home to my mamma once, when I ran away for a butterfly."

"You were a very little girl then. I am surprised that you remember it," in a tone of delight.

"I was five years old then. I'm ten now."

"Do you live here all alone?" pointing to the log-house.

"No, sir; I live with my mamma, and with Evelyn, and with Jim. Tom is married and lives on the other side of the Pinnacle."

"Who is Evelyn, and Jim, and Tom?"

"Evelyn Dare; Tom and Jim are her boys."

"Your name is not Dare?"

"No, sir. My name is Vida; Vida Darcy, I guess. Darcy is mamma's name. Nobody ever calls me anything but Vida."

"Did you ever go to school?"

"No, sir. My mamma teaches me."

"Does she teach you your catechism?"

"No, sir. I never saw a catechism. What is it?"

"It is a book that will teach you how to be good; every little child should study it."

"It can't teach me how to be good, better than the Bible, can it? My mamma teaches me Bible lessons. I know the Sermon on the Mount and the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, the fourteenth chapter of St. John, and ever and ever so many more verses," said Vida warmly, wishing to be polite, for in

her heart she liked this tall, dark rector, yet vaguely feeling called upon to defend her mother.

"Nothing can teach you how to be good like the Bible. But the catechism teaches you how to understand the Bible aright," said the priest, who had already silenced the man. "Has your mother ever taught you the Thirty-nine Articles?"

"No, sir. I never heard of them. What are they?"

"They are the doctrines of the church, and you are old enough to learn them. Can you say the creed. 'I believe in God the Father and' —"

"Yes, sir."

"And you believe it, don't you?"

"Yes, sir ; if my mamma does."

"Will you take me to your mamma?"

"Yes, sir ;" and Vida arose with alacrity, taking the autumn wreaths which she had completed upon her arm. It was the missionary who had spoken last ; even he was not so absorbed in the thought of bringing a stray lamb of the church into its fold but he observed, as she stood up, her unusual height for a child of her years, and her still more unusual beauty. Her hair fell about her slender waist like a fleece of gold, and her eyes looked forth large and lucent as a fawn's. As she ran before him across the meadow to the house, he observed also that this child of the solitude did not look rustic, even in her simple attire.

"Oh, mamma !" she exclaimed under her breath, as she rushed into her mother's room. "The Dufferin rector is coming, and he asked me if I knew the Thirty-nine Articles. And I didn't even know what they meant. Why didn't you teach them to me, mamma?"

Agnes looked at her daughter in astonishment. The child was suffering positive chagrin at her own ignorance.

"Because, my darling, you are not old enough to be troubled about things that you cannot understand and that are not necessary to your goodness."

"The rector says I am old enough. *He* says" —

Before she could add another word the rector's tall head was bent beneath the lowly outer door, and filling a door-way Agnes for the second time beheld Athel Dane. Yet it was not Athel Dane that she saw, but the priest of Dufferin. The man vanished away invisibly somewhere in the woods. The priest was on duty, conscious to his finger-ends of his priestly office seeking lost sheep in the wilderness with far more the air of a master than of a tender shepherd, though he was not conscious of that.

"Good morning, madam," he said in a tone of patronage, of which he was also unconscious because it was habitual. "Your little daughter, I find, is an old acquaintance whom I found in my church-yard once, years ago. It will not be years, I trust, before I see her inside of the church with her mother. You attend church, madam, sometimes, I trust?"

"No," said Agnes, simply, while her divining eyes measured the man and forgot the priest. "I have not attended church for years."

The Rev. Athel Dane was disturbed that she admitted the fact without apology or even excuse. He condescendingly framed one for her.

"Of course the distance is great. Over fifteen miles, I should say?"

"Nearer twenty. But the drive is life giving to me. Other reasons have prevented my being a regular attendant upon church services. But I often take Vida to the school-house only five miles distant. There is something in the prayers and hymns of the simple worshippers very helpful and soul-refreshing."

"I am sorry to hear you say so," — in a tone of severity, — "especially while you utterly neglect the services of the church. May I ask you the reason for such neglect?"

"Yes, sir;" still utterly unawed. "I have personal reasons which I cannot communicate;" and as she said this a pink flush tinged her cheek; "others that I can. The fault may be my own. But I seldom listen to a clergyman who seems to have any real spiritual food for me. What he offers does not seem to feed me."

"Indeed!" with deep emphasis. "Did you ever listen to me?"

"I never did."

"Can you give any reason," in a tone of lofty mental contempt, as if a reason to a creature feminine was a thing impossible, "any satisfactory reason, why men who have made spiritual concerns their sole study still have nothing to give you that you want or need?"

"I think I can. They study too much and live too little."

"Surely you would not have them assume to teach the ignorant without study, without long and ever-continued study?"

"No. I reverence culture in all directions. What I mean is, that no study can take the place of experience."

"Do you mean that clergymen as a class are men without experience, deep spiritual experience?"

"It seems to me as a class their experience is of a character to separate them from the very people whom they would benefit. No man can give of that which he has not."

"Can you explain to me what you mean?" asked the rector with interest, yet with very evident doubt of her ability to "explain."

"They may have changed," she said, "in the long time that I have lived here. I only know how they used to be when I was in the world. Then a man seemed to think that he must be less manly in the sense that we understand manliness, must place himself apart and above other good men, in order to be a clergyman. He looked upon human character and daily life from the angle of his books and dogmas, not from the level of every-day life. Sharing their joys, sorrows, and temptations, he could look into his brothers' and sisters' eyes and hearts, and pity, love, and help them as one of themselves. Instead he preached down to them from an imaginary far-up moral pedestal of his own.

"What he said, perhaps, was very wise and doctrinal, but it was not what they needed. As a human being, was he any better than any other man struggling according to his light from the lower nature up to the higher? But the perpetual assumption that because he was a preacher he was better, or at least different from other men, provoked antagonism and hindered the very good that he honestly desired to see wrought in them."

"Then you do not think a man is entitled to reverence because of his sacred office?"

"No; only so far as in his own character and life he fulfils it. That is why as a class I dislike clergymen," she said with a little gust of her old over-frankness. "They claim a reverence because of their office, that they fail to inspire because of any larger nobleness or deeper spirituality in themselves."

"I am afraid you have been unfortunate in the types of men whom you have known as clergymen."

"Oh no. I speak of them as a class. I have known some exceptions — a few. It makes me sad to think as I do. My father was a clergyman. I revere his memory. I have some of his sermons. I find no arrogance in them, either intellectual or spiritual."

"Do you find this arrogance in all other sermons?"

"No. I have listened to some that were simple, direct, and full of blessed unction. But nearly all the clergymen whom I have known have been mentally and spiritually arrogant, and separate in sympathy and experience from the people; less manly, less spiritual men than many whom they supposed they taught, yet whom the world saw as only very common men in deed."

"You seem to have an ideal teacher in your mind, as the only one fit to be a preacher. Pray, where do you find it?"

"In the life of our Lord. It is real, not ideal, is it not? I can never cease to wonder how the men who have followed Him, to tell others how to be like Him, should themselves be so far from Him in character and spirit. Jesus did not spend his life teaching creeds

but in helping struggling men and women to live. He knew less of schools than of human life. He sat with Mary. He cared for Martha. He wept over Lazarus. He walked with the people in the cornfields on the Sabbath day. He ate with publicans and sinners. He sympathized with human nature in every phase and condition of its earthly life. Through his sympathy and his purity he drew it heavenward. Because He loves us, He draws us after Him to-day," she said, with tears in her eyes and the unction of inspiration in her voice.

The cold, conscientious, unawakened man seemed to perceive her and to hear her through a new sense. Surely she held the secret of the heavenly mystery glowing with a spiritual fire and power that he had never felt.

"Tell me how *you* see the Lord," he said.

"I see Him as He is," she answered softly. "The love and mercy of the Father meet in his humanity. From living experience He fed the inward life. Through human temptation, love, anguish, pity, He drew so near to us that at last He died, that we might live forever in his never-dying memory and expiation. He lives for us now in inwardness of love, purity, yearning pity, self-sacrifice. Through these our souls flower into his likeness. In this way He is to me the clearest and closest reality. Thus I see my Lord and strive to follow after Him."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PREACHER AT THE PINNACLE.

AGNES spoke in utter self-forgetfulness, and the instant she was conscious of what she had done she was frightened, and all the more that the rector of Dufferin, looking her steadfastly in the face, made no reply. He was too amazed to answer. This was not the first log-house in the woods into which he had ventured. Hitherto he had met with no exceptions in their class of inhabitants. Beneath such roofs he had found industry, honesty, rude intelligence, which accepted with silent and becoming awe the lofty instruction proffered by their priestly caller. In the same spirit he entered this house. This fair-haired child inspired him with more than an ordinary interest, therefore with proportionate pastoral peremptoriness he intended to insist upon her being brought forth from this wilderness to the altar instructions of the church.

Whatever his intentions on entering, they had faded and gone. He was pervaded with the startling consciousness that he, the rector, had been receiving instruction ; and from whom ? A woman ! The milliner of Dufferin ! He was dumb with the shock of this utterly new sensation. He, a man, a priest, taught by a woman ! Even while feeling it he was ashamed of his internal resentment ; for through it all his clear

brain said, "If you are so much wiser and greater than she, why does any word of hers trouble you?" Surely no human being could look less aggressive than she, — a small, slight woman, whose clear brown eyes seemed to overflow with a sad tenderness, and whose presence pervaded him with a sense of its gentleness. It was this gentleness that disarmed him, and made him ashamed of his own inward assumptions.

"Will you excuse me for a moment?" she asked, and as she left the room she left him free to examine it. He knew of no drawing-room in Dufferin which bore equal evidence of such ideal personal taste in its adornment as the low-ceiled room of this log-house. Its walls, covered with pale gray cambric, were hung close with pictures, chiefly sketches from nature in oil and water-colors, in rustic frames; while around them and above ran delicate vines from the woods, festooned to the ceiling with wreaths of autumn leaves of the most intense carmine and gold. Bouquets of ferns, maiden-hair, and scarlet berries were set in vases on brackets covered with pale green lichen. A carpet of gray and green covered the floor, and before the small back window, which looked out upon the Tarn, stood a cottage piano.

"Do you play?" asked Athel Dane of Vida, who sat in the open front door.

"A little. My mamma is teaching me. You ask my mamma to sing, please;" leaning forward with a confidential air. "You never heard anybody sing so sweet; her voice is just like the whistling thrush that goes so" — and a long, long note, piercing, sad, and sweet, floated out from the girl's throat as if from a bird's.

"Why, Vida!" said her mother, that moment entering with a tray in her hands.

"I'm making *your* note, mamma; it's so sweet I knew" — the rector would like it, she was going to say, when she flushed with a sudden consciousness of her temerity.

Agnes set her tray upon a stand, and drew it before the stranger. It held glasses of cold spring water, and of raspberry shrub; biscuit, yellow butter, creamy cheese, jam, and a loaf of caraway cake.

"The friend with whom I live is not at home," said Agnes, "but nothing would disturb her more than to know that any one rode all the way from Dufferin to the Pinnacle and back without eating in her house. She will lament that she was not at home to cook you a supper; so I trust you will let me tell her that you did eat something before you left."

Her tone implied that it would be a great favor if he would condescend to partake of what she had brought him. She had failed in reverence to the preacher, — he was keenly conscious of that, — but she was ready to minister to the stranger; that at least was womanly, and Christian. Thus the silent sisters of the infant church ministered to St. Paul himself. Simply from force of habit he felt the impulse to say so, in his most priestly tones; but something in the unconscious face before him restrained the professional remark, as something incongruous. It was too evident that she attached no importance whatever to the act of hospitality. Young, healthy, and hungry, like many another "divine," for the time he quite sunk the conscious greatness of his office in the hearty satisfac-

tion of his stomach. His long ride had sharpened his appetite. The food before him was as pure and delicious as food could be ; and there was a difference, — he felt it in spite of himself, — a difference that was inexpressibly delightful between partaking of food here in this home-like room, in the serene presence of this mother and child, and eating at the regulation table, in the fly-infested dining-room of the Dufferin Hotel.

“ You must be very fond of music, it is so unusual to see a piano so far in the country,” he said ; “ so far in the woods,” he thought, between a bit of biscuit and a spoonful of jam.

“ Music is much to me,” said Agnes, “ and it was necessary to have a piano when my little girl became old enough to take lessons.”

How many days and weeks of extra work were necessary to earn the money to pay for that piano, Agnes did not say.

“ The note your little daughter has given me as yours quite makes me wish to hear the original.”

“ You have no expectation, I trust, that it can sound to you as it does to her ? ”

“ That would be scarcely possible,” was the honest answer. “ But you will really do me another kindness,” bowing over the waiter, “ if you will give me a little music. I often think how much better sermons I could write if I could always hear the organ, as I do sometimes through my study door.”

Agnes went to the piano, and in a moment more her voice, sweet with all home and holy emotion, filled the room with the hymn of “ The Yearning Spirit,” whose first lines are these : —

"Not by deeds that the crowd applauds,
Not by works that give the world renown,
Not by martyrdom, or vaunted crosses,
Canst thou win and wear the immortal crown

"Daily struggling, though enclosed and lonely,
Every day a rich reward will give;
Thou wilt find, by hearty striving only,
And truly loving, thou canst truly live."

"Is that your gospel?" asked Athel Dane.

"It is a part of our Lord's gospel, is it not?" said Agnes.

Her voice and her words went with him through his long return ride. Who was this woman, so strong, so simple, so different from all others in her impersonal unconsciousness. The Dufferin milliner? Preposterous! If she had been that, what was she not, that was more! No one before ever met him as she met him, with such gentle kindness to the person, such slight reverence for the priest. No one ever before made him at once so conscious and so ashamed of his own self-importance. How superfluous was assumption, to a woman so unconscious of her inferiority in being a woman that she was equally oblivious to his superiority in being a man! It never seemed to occur to her once, that she as a woman was bound to receive the instructions of a priest, nor was there the slightest assumption in her manner. "She simply spoke to me as one soul might speak to another, if it were unclothed upon of mortality," he said. A week had passed since this visit to the Pinnacle, and the Rev. Athel Dane had arrived at the positive conviction, at last acknowledged to himself, that he desired to make another. Of course com-

plex feelings entered into the desire, a part of which he eagerly acknowledged, and another part of which he as blindly ignored. He was haunted by a suspicion that as a clergyman he did not come off victorious. He should have impressed upon the mind of this woman a positive conviction of her duty to attend more faithfully to the ordinances of the church, and to a preparation of her child for confirmation. Above all he should have reproved her positively for saying that as a class she did not like clergymen. Such a remark was a reflection on the sacred office. He should not have forgotten his priestly state so far as to have been moved by the tones of her voice and the unction of her spirit, as at heart he knew that he was.

He must visit her again, if only to remove such an unfortunate impression from her mind, if he had left it there; and to perform his parochial duty, as such, without a flaw. It was a great pity that such an interesting child should grow up without the advantages of systematic instruction. He should propose that she be sent to Dufferin to school, or that he should visit the Pinnacle himself as her instructor. Meanwhile, without having received any hints of the lady's taste in the matter, he was looking over his books to find something at once edifying and interesting for her reading. He had selected "*The True Churchman*," a manual of church duties, a volume of *Whately's Sermons*, and, as an offset against such serious reading, "*The Annals of a Quiet City*," which, though not doctrinal, he considered suggestive and devout. "She is an exceptional woman, but even she will admit, after she has read them, that not a woman on earth could have written these books."

he said to himself as he carefully dusted these volumes and strapped them before his departure for the Pinnacle. The tattle of Stella Moon never penetrated the exalted sphere wherein the Rev. Athel Dane revolved. If it did, Ulm Neil long before had vanished from the post-office whose letters Stella inspected. The name never issued from its mail-bags after the reception of the check which paid for "Basil: A Boy." From that day all matter directed to Ulm Neil had been sent to the Lake, more than twenty miles away, and in an opposite direction. Thus the name had no association to the Dufferin rector outside of "The Annals of a Quiet City."

The day was divine enough to have drawn every creature of God out into his atmosphere. It was one of those superlative days which suffuse sometimes this land of the north, to show us what the air of Paradise may be. It was a dreamy day of fragrant warmth and misty sunshine, its tints all pink and azure and silver. The white clouds, massed against the pale blue of the sky, were flushed with the delicate rose which touches the lining of sea-shells. The mountain faces shone withdrawn and dim through folded silvery veils, and the earth itself, with its tints of green and gold and carmine, seemed afloat in a circumfluent sea of silver. The spell of the day was too potent for Agnes. She laid down the task that seemed endless. She gave Vida and herself a holiday.

At the end of the path which led from the house, within the shelter of the willows at the edge of the Farn, were two boats. One belonged to Evelyn, in which on idle days she would sit for hours angling for

trout in the centre of the Tarn ; the other, smaller and stancher, Jim Dare built expressly for Agnes and Vida. In this, to-day, the mother and child floated out upon the placid water. Once in the centre of the lake they looked up to the profile on the Pinnacle. It was the rarest of mountain profiles, that it exacted no tribute from the imagination. There it was, indubitably wrought by the elements in immemorial stone, the clear, grave profile of the Father of his Country. Washington's forehead, nose, mouth, and chin were set there, fronting storm and sunshine, high on the mountain-side. Above it rose the serried turrets of the Pinnacle, while on the other side, down to the water's edge, spread that opulent garniture of leaf and bloom which marks the foliage of the north. From the base to the summit of the Pinnacle now the birches, maples, and poplars held their flaming torches into the changeless faces of the firs. Agnes rowed slowly out to the Pinnacle. Here was a place prepared for them. A path had been cut through the undergrowth to a covert in the side of the mountain. It was a natural room with an open front facing the Tarn. Its sides, back, and roof were of rock. Here were rustic seats and a table. Here for the five summers and autumns gone, Agnes had come to think long, long thoughts, and to make a holiday for her child ; and for Evelyn and Jim when they wanted one.

There was a quality of mystic peace in this day which made even Vida silent. It was born of a ripened earth, and of elements in equipoise. There was a brooding warmth, a pervasive sweetness, in the air. It was all penetrated with the exuding honey of the

spruces, and the floating fragrance of the ferns. No house was in sight, and the little lake under the Pinna- cle seemed shut in alone with the mother-earth and her tribes. Its crinkling waves ran up and broke into glittering shreds upon the slender lances of the reedy grasses that lined its shores. On three sides it was shut in by high walls of foliage. To the south the peaks of Mount Norton, Mount Averill, and Mount John were notched against the sky. Above them pink-white clouds were sailing like a procession of swans. Within, the presumptuous trout spread out their widening rings upon the blue-green lake, and leaped defiantly up into the sunshine. A solitary kingfisher shot beneath the water after one as his prey, and rose again with a shriek of disappointment. Across the Tarn a loon was calling, with a cry so human that Vida answered, "What do you want, Mrs. Loon? Do you want my seed-cakes?"

When the loon grew silent, a crow cawed and called in the still woods overhead. In the boughs beside them a squirrel cracked his nuts unscared. Happy grasshoppers vaulted through the russet grass. A cricket piped in peace in his house of moss. And before their eyes clouds of ecstatic insects danced together, and then dissolved away into the golden air.

"Oh, mamma," cried Vida, who was leaning on her mother's lap. "There is Evelyn, coming with a man!"

Agnes withdrew her eyes from the distant mountains whither she had been gazing, and looking across the Tarn saw Evelyn just putting out from shore with a man in her boat.

"It's not Jim, or he'd row," said Vida, yet unable to distinguish the coming personage; then as the boat drew nearer: "Oh, mamma, it is — it *is* the Dufferin rector! How glad I am!"

"Hush! He will hear you. Why are you so glad?"

"I like him."

"Why do you like him?"

"He is so big, and — so fine."

"Do you mean that his clothes are fine?"

"No. But his clothes *are* fine, and *he* is fine not rough, like Jim. And — and, mamma, he looks so sorry, and" — with a touch of reproach — "you made him look sorrier when you didn't say I could learn the Thirty-nine Articles. You won't to-day, will you, mamma? Please tell him I may study them."

"Why, Vida! I cannot understand why you are so moved with compassion for this gentleman that you want to study the Thirty-nine Articles to please him. I have not found my little girl so very anxious to learn even her New Testament lessons."

"But, mamma, you never seemed to feel so bad as he does. You don't look so gloomy. And — I never saw a man who looked so nice."

This remark reminded Agnes how very few men her little daughter had seen since her fifth year, — the Dares, the countrymen on the road, the shop-keepers at Dufferin, or its "gentlemen," as distant moving images.

Meanwhile Evelyn, as she rowed slowly across the mile of water, was busy taking every atom of clerical starch out of the gentleman whom she was conveying. It was due entirely to her that he was in the boat at

all. When he proposed to leave the books for Mrs. Darcy with his compliments, Evelyn broke out :—

“ Oh, Mister Dane, you jest go an’ tell her yourself! ’Tain’t nothin’, jest goin’ across the pond. She’s gone over to the Pinnerkel to spend the hull day, an’ hes more time to visit, a sight, than if she wus tu hum. An’ it would be a burnin’ shame for ye to ride all the way from the street fur nothin’.”

Thus Athel Dane (not the rector) allowed himself to be led, he never knew just how, down to the water and into the boat, by Evelyn. And now that she had him out in mid-water, in the very heart of the “ fish-ing-ground,” she was enlivening him with some of the biggest of her trout stories.

“ Many’s the mornin’ I’ve sot in this very spot, stun still, hours runnin’, waitin’ a bite. ’Twasn’t so wunst. I caught forty pound right here one mornin’ afore ten o’clock, without stirrin’ my boat an inch; an’ one feller was a three-pounder. That was fifteen year ago, afore all Dufferin come here a-fishin’.”

“ I should think by the way they jump that the pond must be full of them now,” observed her listener.

“ So ’tis; but, my ! them trout know jest as well as I do, that ’taint fishin’ time, or they’d never flounder up like that ! no kingfisher an’ no hook, though stuck full of angle-worms to the end, ken ketch ’em now. Why, it’s a’most spawnin’ time. They’re jest havin’ their last frolic afore they go into the spawnin’ beds. By the fust of October ’twill be agin the law to tech one on ’em, providin’ you could; but you couldn’t; they’re mighty knowin’, I can tell ye.”

As they drew so near to the Pinnacle that the two

figures sitting by its room of rock could be distinguished, Athel Dane felt suddenly overcome at the thought of what he was doing, and a mighty impulse to turn back struck against the mightier impulse to go forward. He had intended the call as a purely clerical one, on a lady who had quietly said to him that as a class she did not like clergymen, and if he had felt some misgivings in calling upon her in his priestly function, as a gentleman he could offer no excuse whatever for following, to a retreat like this, a lady whom he had seen but once. He had these conflicting thoughts in his mind, and the books he had brought still strapped to his shoulder, as Evelyn's rude barge pushed in among the reeds, and Athel Dane could do nothing but step out upon shore. Agnes arose from her seat to receive her visitor, who, as he looked into the room of rock and to the emjattled steep above it, said : " One of God's sanctuaries. I am glad to find you in it."

" I am so often found in it that it may be called my chosen one," she answered. " I welcome to it now the rector of Dufferin."

Just the reply to prompt a priestly homily from said rector. Strange it seemed to himself afterwards that he did not improve the chance it gave. But he did not. The peace of the place, the mesmerism of the day, had already overtaken him. In such an air, under such a sky, in such a presence, preaching seemed an impertinence, and the tones of his own voice sounded alien and hard, and repelled him. He wished that Evelyn would stop telling stories of the smugglers who used to hide their goods in this cave behind the rocks ; and as Mrs. Darcy was beyond all question remarkably refined, how

could she smile so gently and listen so attentively to these stories, told as she must be aware in a very coarse voice? The Rev. Athel Dane inwardly chafed and fumed under it. He forgot the fact that her being there at all was an act of kindness to himself quite unmerited. Her sudden thought of "dinner" was extremely welcome to him, and for a reason entirely distinct from the prospect of eating her good things. How could he talk of books, of the church, of anything that he wanted to talk about, with that clarion voice ringing out its vernacular in his ears?

"Jest stay as long as you hev a mind tu," said Evelyn, seeing that the Dufferin rector had not the slightest intention of going, and judging from the size of the books which he unstrapped from his shoulder, and the bigness of the "bumps" that she called "language," that he had unlimited wisdom, if not religion, to propound. "Jest you stay, an' I'll go back and cook ye a nice dinner, an' when it's smokin' hot I'll send Jim over to row you back. Jim can row anything. Why, he jest come over here for this boat that some feller had tugged off, t'other day, in a sap-pan! What d'ye think of that? I don't believe another livin' critter could hev rowed a sap-pan; he can't swim a stroke, nuther, hisse'f, an' he'd 'a' ben drowned sure, if he couldn't 'a' kep' the pan from tippin'."

And in this glow of mother-triumph Evelyn departed to achieve her culinary victories. There was no time to be lost. Jim Dare might appear with the boat any moment. Thus without preliminaries Athel Dane hastened to offer the loan of the books to this woman, who, he felt sure, must be in a state of star

vation for reading of any sort above the Farmer's Almanac. Poor fellow! He could not help the tone of condescension and patronage which would come into his voice from sheer habit; he did not know they were in it now. He only knew it was pleasant to be able to lend this interesting but benighted woman some proper food for her mind and soul.

"This manual I trust you will find very salutary," he said. "I pray that it may tend to the quickening of your spirit, and to the upbuilding of your life in a more lively faith; and these sermons of a true servant of the church, I trust that they may arouse in you a desire to listen to the spoken word from the lips of a living preacher; and here is a little book quite opposite in form but consonant in spirit — a favorite of mine." Athel Dane was speaking now. "Indeed, I may say that it has a fascination for me in this, — that without actually portraying our northern scenery, it in an indescribable way seems to be perfectly familiar with it, and to overflow with the quality of this atmosphere," he said, expanding his lungs and taking in an extra draught of the spiced wine of the autumnal air.

"I hope it will afford you half the pleasure it has given me," he added in a tone which indicated that said "half" would fill the full measure of her capacity. "I consider this a delicious bit of English. May I read it to you?" he asked, opening the book where he had placed a mark. And as if silence gave consent, in a deep, monotonous voice, but with clear, sympathetic intonation, Athel Dane proceeded to read. How vividly it brought back to Agnes the wintry day, void,

desolate, into whose chill air it came from out the silence of her soul. If with repressed yet sure resilience it struck her now, through the reader's voice, it was because her soul's impalpable life thrilled the mute page, a quickening verity.

When he ceased reading she was silent. He felt a sense of disappointment. Why did he expect a woman, any woman, to feel to the quick the subtle suggestiveness, or even the unpretending beauty, of the page that he had read? In the same instant he was conscious that this woman's silence was more acceptable, at least less tormenting, to him, than the average woman's little parrot shriek of: "Oh, how beautiful!" or, "Perfectly lovely, Mr. Dane!" Her silence proved her, so far, an exception to her race.

"Does this page suggest anything to you?" he inquired in a hopeless tone.

"Yes: that the person who wrote it had learned life through sharp inward experience."

"Do you perceive nothing — nothing higher, in it, than experience?"

"Perhaps; that is the quality in it that I feel the most."

"Strange. Its subjectivity and suggestiveness are the qualities in it which impress me."

"Are not these qualities likely to be the sequence of profound inward experience?"

"Not more than of intuition and of insight, I should say. You speak of 'the person.' Surely you have no doubt a man wrote it?"

"Are you sure, Mr. Dane?"

"Certainly I am."

“Why are you sure?”

“The book is full of indubitable proof. It would be impossible for any woman to understand the interior working of a man’s mind as this writer understands it. No woman can comprehend a man, to say nothing of embodying such a comprehension in fit language. This single page I have read is proof in itself that it could never have been written by a woman. It is womanly to be tender, but it is for man only to be strong in his tenderness;” with an air of magnificence.

“Thank you. I shall remember your definitions, and think them over while reading the book. It will be pleasant to read it by the light you have given me.”

Surely this was a compliment. Yet under it he felt, rather than perceived by any look or tone, that this woman already held an opinion of her own concerning the book, which his did not move in the slightest; and the feeling annoyed him into silence. He looked across the Tarn to the opening in the willows where he expected every moment to see Jim Dare appear; feeling that his time was short, he made a sudden plunge toward the subject really uppermost in his mind.

“Does your little daughter attend school, Mrs. Darcy?”

“No. She has never been to school in her life.”

“Do you object to her attending the academy on Dufferin Street?”

“Only as I object to her attending the church there. It is too distant for her to go without her mother, and I have not yet been able to bring myself to a willingness to live on Dufferin Street; though I may be com-

pelled to do so. Thus far I have been able to teach her myself. But I am so fully taxed in other directions that as the demands of her education increase, I'm afraid I shall not have the time or strength for the study which I shall find necessary for her sake."

"Do you object to her having a teacher here?"

"It is the desire of my heart, but it is impossible. No one this side of Dufferin could teach her the higher branches. No teacher in Dufferin would ride nearly forty miles in a day for a single pupil."

"I would."

"You! The rector of Dufferin! The clergyman of St. John's!"

"You say that a teacher for your little girl is the desire of your heart. I trust you have no serious objection to me for such an office. I assure you it is one to which I am quite accustomed. I taught classes of seminary girls in Latin and mathematics during my college course. I increased my allowance and never taxed me at all. Now my one recreation is my long country rides. The longer ones have always needed an object outside of myself. I can find one here. Say I come every Monday. Monday is a very desultory day with me, always. I'm restless, and want to be off. I can never settle myself in my study till the reaction from the Sabbath is past. I can give her lessons for the entire week, and on Monday ride over to hear her recite, and to instruct her. Nothing could be easier."

"Nor more delightful," sighed little yellow-hair serenely, murmuring to herself in a way that saved her words from all sound of impertinence.

"Vida, do you hear what this kind gentleman offers to do for you? Thank him, my darling, as your mother does."

"Yes, mamma. Please let him teach me. I will learn my lessons *so* good."

"Better than for your mother?"

"Yes, I'll be so ashamed not, for him! You love me, mamma, no matter how bad I do. Of course the rector will never love me," with a sigh, "but I will study as well as ever I can, if he don't," heroically.

"I love all good little girls," said the aged gentleman of twenty-seven benignly.

"I am not good," said Vida hopelessly. "I pulled my cat's tail yesterday because I was angry. I was mad at her for ketchin' a little yellow-bird. And this morning I pinched my dolly's nose because she wouldn't stand up like a lady. I've — a dreadful temper; I feel it in my throat like a ball, when Jim teazes me. Then Evelyn calls me a little crosspatch," bitterly; "but mamma never does. *She* always loves me. I like you — better than any one I ever saw except mamma. If you will teach me I will learn everything you tell me to, as well as ever I can."

A pang shot through Agnes' heart at Vida's words, "I like you better than any one I ever saw except mamma." Alas! that her sylvan child, to whom this man wore the semblance of a god, should ever have uttered them to any one but her own father.

A little child led them. Vida had her way. The rector of Dufferin had his also. Agnes acquiesced with deep gratitude and many misgivings over the state of obligation in which she was placing herself, to one

almost a stranger ; obligation which money only could never annul, for it was impossible for her to be insensible to the inestimable advantage to her child of the very thorough instruction which the rector of Dufferin was capable of imparting. By the time Jim Dare pushed off his boat from the other side of the Tarn, Vida had fixed fate with her prattling tongue.

Thus began one of those close personal friendships between a man and a woman placed amid exceptional circumstances, whose ethics make a chosen study of psychologists, and an open question to moralists, but which in experience prove to be as opposite in influence as the beings who enter into their compacts ; the result in weal or woe to such beings depending utterly on the quality of their natures and the measure of their grace.

In time, and not very long time, either, the Monday of each week came to be the day of days at the Pinnacle. Each one was an event in the slow, still tide of days hitherto marked by no epochs ; days all alike in their silence, that knew no gradation of tint or outline, save only what the seasons gave them. Now Monday was the day on which Evelyn spread her choicest viands. Was there any compound of eggs and cream, of meats and spices, and home fruits, too good for the rector of Dufferin ? Evelyn thought not, and therefore ministered unto him in all the unctuous richness of this faith. It was the day for which all other days seemed made to the child Vida, in her fresh frock, with her carefully conned tasks, studied faithfully every day but Sunday, for this day, when, with fear and trembling, yet with inward delight, they were

recited to the ever godlike and adored teacher. Privately it was Vida's cherished opinion that no little girl ever had such a grand god of a teacher as she had. But we do not forget that Vida was a child of the woods, and never before, since she was old enough for conscious observation and comment, had been brought in near contact with a gentleman in breeding and culture.

More and more this Monday came to be a white day to Agnes. It brought her the one voice that spoke to her from the great outer world of thought and action which she had left behind. By degrees, imperceptibly it brought her more, — a something of whose possession at last she became conscious with a deep thankfulness, — mental companionship. Till she knew that this was hers again, she did not know how much she had missed it out of her life. She had appreciated to the fulness of tender gratitude the good gifts that had been hers, the shelter, the sympathy, the affection which environed her, rude though they often were in their manifestations. She had not allowed herself to think, even, of anything more as ever again to be her own. Thus when it came to her unsought, this interchange of congenial thoughts, this real companionship and communion of mind with one whose chances for culture had so far transcended her own, whose range of exact knowledge was so much broader than hers could ever be, it seemed to her a direct boon.

She was the more grateful when she knew it, because she did not come into the conscious possession of any such good at once. While at first she felt extremely grateful to the Rev. Athel Danc, he per-

sonally repelled her, nevertheless. He was very wise, she knew, for so young a man; but he would be very much more agreeable, she thought, if he could seem considerably less conscious of it. His mannerism of attire and of address silently repelled her severely fastidious taste. She thought it self-conscious if not self-conceited. She wanted to be charitable, but what did his remarks express if not intense spiritual pride? Was this the essence of the man, or the result of his special training? Was it conscious self-satisfaction, or unconscious ignorance of his true self? She did not know which to conclude, at first; but she knew at once that it was very disagreeable.

His one trait which seemed intolerable, which so often struck from her brain the quick flash of inward resentment, was his mental contempt for women. It was a deep flaw in his usual good breeding, that he so often made this contempt apparent — to a woman.

The religion of gentle manners, which never forgets the feelings of others, would have held dumb the covert or open sneer against woman to a woman, — most of all to a woman who never named manhood save in reverence. But the man who intends to be most generous is never aware how many thoughtless words he utters, which cut into the heart of the true woman by his side because she is a woman. Man-like, Athel Dane dealt in generalities. Woman-like, Agnes Darcy applied the concrete. It was impossible for her to know in his utterances of general impatience and contempt concerning women, how soon he came to make silently an exception of herself. Nor, had she known it, would it have afforded her the slightest comfort.

She held herself as in no wise above or different from her kind.

But there came a time when he grew silent on this theme, which before seemed an ever-present irritation in his mind. If he did not speak in praise of women, he was at least silent on their foibles. Agnes noticed the silence, and was grateful for it; from that time began the real companionship of this man and woman in the equal human nature which each alike received from God. Agnes never argued on so supremely foolish a theme as the equality or inequality of the sexes, which, in two halves, make human nature complete. She simply lived before him, true to the best that God had given her; and because she lived, he came at last to reverence all womanhood for her sake. Nor did he differ from the race of men in this, that he learned to measure all women by the woman whom he knew best. It was a revelation, an inspiration, new and wonderful, when for the first time in his life he formed a habit of being with a woman who, while she held in herself an undefined personal charm for him, was nearly five years his senior by time, and fifty by actual experience; and who was his equal in intellect and in culture, if not in positive learning.

She might have been all these, and yet never have been the force in his life which she became. She was this because she had that insight into his nature, and that sympathy with it, which revealed himself to himself, while at the same time it seemed to draw him to a higher good. By what fine gradations and subtle phrasing she drew forth into the light phases of his own character before undreamed of by himself! It

seemed to him that he was a stranger to his own soul till he knew this woman. Yet it was not that she often defined in speech the finer possibilities of his nature. She in herself seemed to embody a quality of soul more inspiring than he ever yet had known. By her very being and atmosphere she quickened in him emotion, aspiration, and strength. The very thought of her was transmuted in him into moral insight and power. If he felt a consciousness of peace in her presence, the like of which he had never attained to in his existence before; when he neither saw her face nor heard her voice, he perceived her no less as a new and undreamed-of force in his thought and action.

Thus to move and to mould the inward nature of a man, a woman must first have lived broadly, profoundly, both in thought and in emotion. By the keenest discipline of life, by the utmost consecration which is its final crown, she must have come into possession and command of her whole selfhood. With a capacity to suffer and to love unknown to the untested and unpurified, she is at the mercy of no impulse in herself, or in another. It may reach her, but can never overthrow her, in the high, clear atmosphere wherein she abides. Such potency and such command cannot belong to extreme youth. Thus it so often happens that young men of the finest mould are said to love women older than themselves. Men who have attained the highest distinction as men have almost always, at some stage of their youth, entered into such an experience. It by no means follows that this experience should prove to be the passion of love, or end in marriage; no less it tinges, if it does not shape, all

the future of the man. It is impossible that he should remain what he was before he touched as a quick-stone this potent good, whose fine vibration will thrill through his being while he exists.

So much by the gentle attrition of long-continued intercourse Agnes became to Athel Dane. Softly as flowers blossom, her influence expanded in his heart. Silent as dew falls, it was shed upon his arid life till it bloomed all over with gentle amenities. The growth was not of a day. Slowly he came to the consciousness that she, lowly and lovable as a woman, was also infinitely more than he once believed any woman could be to him, a mental and spiritual force in his thoughts and life. He placed himself under the most rigid self-examination concerning the heavenly Mondays toward which he discovered himself turning with ever-increasing interest and desire. What did they contain, after all, that he should want it so much, and recur to it so often, with such a sense of deep satisfaction? Only a long ride over the hills and through the woods, then a child to be taught, a golden girl, a wood-nymph in pure health, full of intuitive intelligence, acute sensibility, torrents of temper, swift contritions, and a lovesomeness which triumphed over all; only a silent woman sitting apart at her sewing or sketching, a woman still young, as time is counted, but with a look in her eyes that seemed to come from far distant spheres, whose presence was more pervasive in its silence than that of other women set in the aura of smile and speech; a half-hour's conversation with her, perhaps, when the lessons were over, between Vida's questions, and with Evelyn bustling about. Yet it was the words uttered then, the turn of the head, the tones of her voice, that went back

with him through the long ride, and stayed with him till he came again.

He knew nothing of her past life. Their intercourse was not of the sort that impinged upon their own personal experiences. Concerning herself he had never asked her a question, and she had never essayed a confidence. Through the new spiritual vision by which he perceived her, he believed in her without doubt or query. "It is enough for me that she *is*," he said, if he ever found himself speculating on the possible past which had contributed to such a flowering of mind and spirit.

When, one late autumn Sabbath, Agnes and Vida appeared in the stone church of Dufferin, its rector's joy was full. The whole audience seemed to concentrate into one pair of eyes turned toward the preacher. As he became conscious of it he thought, "It is well that she cannot come always, or even often; what she gave of inspiration I should give back in consciousness only to herself, and forget the others, which would be wrong." To Agnes, the organ anthems, the sweet voices bearing heavenward "*Te Deum laudamus*," the responses of the people, the devout utterances of the preacher, moved her soul to its depths, to remember and to worship. Like human companionship, not till it came to her again did she realize how she had missed or needed the ministry of the Lord's anointed, the service of his holy temple.

By degrees the people of Dufferin became aware of a change in their rector. He was less oracular, more simply manly. He seemed to have cast off his burden of conscious superiority somewhere, and to now take the hand of a parishoner as one fallible human being

may that of another. He ceased to treat the young women of the congregation as if they belonged to a proscribed caste upon whom he must turn a sort of angel Gabriel glance, and then his back. At last he treated them as fellow-mortals, if naught beside. He became a hero to every little school-child that he met by the way, whose hand he took, and whose confidence he won. He was found oftener in the houses of the poor, and by the beds of the sick. The cold fastidiousness which had been in him a prevailing and repelling trait, that had jarred sadly upon his people, gradually melted into a glow of sympathy and of unconscious kinship, as if he had come into consort at last with human need; with its weakness, folly, and pain, as well as with its high aspiration and lofty fulfilment.

The change in himself was felt not more in his actions than through all his sermons. They ceased to be fine disquisitions on a remote heaven and a still more remote God. Now it was, "God with us;" "God made manifest in the flesh;" "God is love;" "God is our Father: our closest friend;" "Heaven begins here;" "Religion is not gloom, — it is growth, faith, purity, joy, not only in believing, but in doing, being, living, *now*." At last he had food for the people. The people came and were fed, because their souls were hungry for human as well as heavenly help. The name of the young rector of Dufferin was never uttered by so many lips, in such loving accents, as now. The aged, the little child, the very poor, spoke the tenderest words for him.

At last one day Stella Moon whispered: "The rector is goin' to marry Madame Darcy; he rides to the Pinnacle every Monday — Jim Dare told me so."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ETHELINDA.

It had been snowing for days. The rustling seed-vessels shivering on their shrivelled stems, the withered ferns, the sodden leaves of rusty brown, the purple lichens, the scarlet berries, all were buried many feet below the muffling snows of the new year. With great difficulty the beginning of a road had been attempted through the woods. Jim Dare's oxen had dragged a path through it only to see it half filled again with the great drifts that scurried before the keening winds. Avalanches of snow rushed with muffled thud from battlement to buttress of the Pinnacle. Snow high as the log-house itself walled it in. Through the hollow squares that had been cut to admit it, the gray light crept feebly and intermittingly into the tiny double-sashed windows. The cold settled down silent, pitiless, freezing, as long night crept after the short-lived day.

As the darkness deepened, Agnes peered through the window toward the woods. "How thankful I am that no one need go on that road to-night!" she said. "Thank God, we are all well," looking with grateful eyes over the little group. "Nothing short of sickness unto death could take any one out such a night into such roads. Even you, Evelyn, must own that it would be almost at the cost of life that any one would attempt the roads to-night."

"Well child, no one ain't a-goin' to tempt 'em. Still, I don't say as I hain't bin thro' 'em nights jest as freezin'. An' I never friz nothin' more 'n my nose; that swelled and blistered and busted at the end every winter at the same time for years after, an' I'm alive yit. Come, deary, don't be looking out the winder jest for the sake of bein' lonesome. Go an' help Jim an' Baby with their candy-pull. If you'll jest stir the butternuts into their taffy, 't 'ill do 'em no end of good."

Agnes did as she was bidden. By the kitchen table Jim, with clean, buttered hands, was pulling with all his might a huge mass of congealed molasses, while Vida with rosy fingers was stirring the maple syrup bubbling in a kettle on the stove. Into this, in due time, Agnes cast the unctuous butternut kernels, and before she left them the "taffy" was cooling in the snow, and the great platter on the table was spread thick with the golden sticks of crisp, twisted candy, which was the delight of Vida's eyes, as the butternut sweets in pillerred quantities was discomfiture to her stomach and tinder to her temper.

Agnes was interested in their "candy-pull" and chatted with them as if she thought of nothing else; but under all, her thoughts would go out in dumb quest into the snow-piled freezing night. Something far out in it seemed projected toward her, till it touched and thrilled that "instinctive nerve" which to one school of physicians explains the deep inward consciousness of unseen things that in the rarest organisms makes the distant nebulous fact a clear, close verity to the interior vision. Something far out in the darkness and the cold seemed to be drawing nearer to her. What was it?

She did not know. Nor did she speak of the night again. She sat in silence and waited — waited with a constantly quickening pulse — something, somebody, coming to her !

“ I snum ! If thar ain’t sleigh-bells ! ” exclaimed Evelyn with a start, “ and — what is the matter ? your face is jest gray and your eyes big as saucers — why what’s to scare ye ! ’Tain’t nothin’ but sleigh-bells. Hi Sanderson with a party from the Corners, like as not. *They* don’t feel no cold, all wrapt up in love and buff-lo robes, I ken tell ye.” Evelyn seized the candle from the table and opening the front door held it out into the blackness. It threw one fitful flare across the snow, fluttered in the wind, and went out.

“ Pitch black, an’ some un *is* comin’, sure as judgment. Jim, bring the lantern, quick ! ” screamed Evelyn.

The bells struck keen and clear now against the metallic air as the sleigh emerged from the woods. By the time that Jim’s lantern threw its shifting bridge of light across the snow, two horses plunged through the half broken path up to the door, and a man’s voice through a fur muffler called from the driver’s seat of a covered stage sleigh : —

“ Evelyn Dare, here’s a passenger fur you, and a’most dead, I reckon ! ”

“ Hi Sanderson, is that *you*, a-drivin’ ? ”

“ Yes ; couldn’t trust no one else with a sick woman more’n I could with a sleighin’ party. Come along, Jim. You’ll hev to help kerry her in.”

“ In goodness’ name, who hev you got ! ” and Evelyn rushed knee-deep into the snow to hold the lantern to the sleigh door while Hi Sanderson and Jim bore from

it what seemed to be a lifeless burden, wrapped in buffalo robes. She preceded it to the house, and once inside she held the lantern before the death-white face now visible between the furs.

"In the name of Almighty God who *be* you?" she cried with consternation.

"Ethelinda Kane!" exclaimed Agnes in hollow tone, as the face emerged from the robes and the two men laid the motionless form upon the lounge. The dead-white face, the dead-white hair, could these be hers! An old trick of the eyelids, the eyes the same as of old, as they slowly opened, told Agnes who had come. As she saw she recoiled "The evil angel of my life has reached me at last, even here," she said inwardly, and drew still further back.

"It'll be all right, I reckon, another time," said Hi Sanderson, glancing from Evelyn to Agnes. He had performed what he mentally estimated as "a very tough job" that night, and naturally did not want its money value utterly ignored even in the consternation which the new-comer had so visibly caused. Even she understood what he meant, for she began to fumble under her wrappings as if for her purse. This act brought Agnes out of the past and into adjustment with the present.

"No, no," she exclaimed for the first time approaching Linda and laying her own hand upon the restless hand under the robe. "Please pay Mr. Sanderson now, Evelyn, and I will settle with you," she said, as she turned down the buffalo blanket and compelled her eyes to gaze upon the form within. As she gazed, resentment died. Was this woman the lithe Linda

who, when she beheld her last, was so full of acute, subtle life? If she was abnormally alert and dangerous then, she was vanquished now. Because she was vanquished was she here? Agnes did not pause to answer the questions which rushed tumultuously through her mind. Down went the past deeper and deeper beneath the rising pity that now overspread her soul. Wrong, injury, cruelty, lay far back. The scathed hair, the sunken eyes, the pinched face, the hectic cheek, the short laborious breath were before her eyes, appealing to her helping hand and to her tender heart.

Before the sound of Hi Sanderson's retreating sleigh-bells had died in the distance the freestones were heating for Linda's feet. Warm woollen blankets were wrapped about Linda's attenuated body. Hot spiced drinks, refreshing and gently stimulating, had stirred her benumbed pulses and stolen through her chilled surfaces in a grateful glow. Even the glassy eyes suffused into a mist of human softness. It was evident that she was a very sick woman; but no less apparent that the almost insensible condition in which she arrived was the result of her journey and the extreme cold upon a body already depleted by sickness.

Agnes, holding Linda's hands between hers, was trying by the gentlest friction to revive their dull circulation. Linda's eyes looked up to hers with the old repelling trick of their lifting eyebrows. It recalled so much that Agnes involuntarily closed hers while her soft hands rubbed on.

"I thought I could say everything when I saw you,"

whispered Linda at last, "everything ; and I can say nothing."

"Better nothing," said Agnes softly ; then fearing these words sounded unkindly, she added, "better nothing till you are stronger."

"I shall never be any stronger ; but I am fast getting warmer, thank you ;" and as she withdrew her eyes they encountered Vida's gazing upon her from a corner with the blaze of the lantern falling full upon her face. What was it in that young face with its fresh, bright tints which arrested and held the sick woman's gaze till she shook with a spasm of tears ? What, but its intangible likeness to the face of the man who had made her existence, and for whose sake she had been ready to destroy her soul ?

"Don't !" said Agnes imploringly. "Don't ! I beg of you. You will kill yourself. Vida, come here. Do you know who this lady is, my darling ?" she asked as her little daughter drew close to her side.

"Yes, mamma ; she is Auntie Linda."

"You remember her ?"

"Yes, mamma." Vida did not add that she remembered also her Auntie Linda's last lesson was that Vida must love her better than she did her mamma. This recollection made the child's face harden as she gazed now, for the one idol of her heart was her mother. But perceiving the expression of her mother's eyes, she interpreted their meaning and obeyed it. Without a word she stooped and kissed the convulsed face before her. Its painful tension relaxed as the little girl did so. The bloom of the young cheek touched the wasted one, and at the touch it seemed to smooth it into peace.

Linda opened her eyes, stretched forth her feeble arms and held the child to her fluttering heart in a passionate embrace.

"You are like him — like *him*," she sighed, "as he was once, when I slaved for him, and went hungry that he might eat. Oh, how beautiful he was! I have come so far, so far to find you, and you are like him."

"Like whom?" asked the child, lifting her face.

"Like your father, sweet one."

Again a shadow crossed the lucent eyes. She remembered her father's face as if it looked out upon her from a distant dream. She knew it by the picture which her mother cherished. Yet the thought of him was a mystery and a doubt. If she had a father, where was he? Why was her mother and she alone? And wherefore had this dreadful Auntie Linda come to make her think of such wretched things?

"Your Auntie Linda loved you so much and took such care of you when you were a little baby, you will nurse her and help to make her well again, won't you?" said her mother, seeing the shadow and seeking to disperse it.

"Yes, mamma, I will. I will help *you* as much as ever I can; and" — with a deprecating, downward glance — "and Auntie Linda."

In another instant the child was glad in her heart that she added the last name, as she beheld with terror the distorted face and racked frame of the new-comer, who was seized with a paroxysm of coughing. Agnes held Linda's head, and Vida ran at Evelyn's bidding for the restoratives that might bring present relief. None availed. Nature persisted in its own torturing

process of relief, and when it ended, Linda sank into the sleep of prostration. Before she was buried in its oblivion, she was borne by strong, gentle hands into Agnes' room, and laid on Agnes' bed. Vida slept upon the lounge in the outer room. Her mother kept watch within at the foot of the sleeper's bed, by the little window where so many hours and days of her later life had been lived. Here the later creations of her brain and spirit had taken an outline and form. All, this moment, were as if they had never been. With the woman on the bed all the old suffering had come back. She sat face to face with her past. Insect-stings, petty torture, injury, insult, that imbittered her heart, darkened her youth, destroyed her woman's life, did they not live again at the sight of this woman! Wherefore had she come? Wherefore?

The spasmodic breath, the death-struck face, told wherefore. "She needs me," said Agnes' heart softly — "needs *me*. Where are *they*? Of all on earth why should she come to *me* — to me, who have the least. What have I? What can I have that she wants?" "Forgiveness," whispered the spirit, "pity, charity that is love." And her soul above its wreck of life cried for help that it might still have strength to aid another whose ruin was more utter than her own.

As if help could come down to her from out the vastness of the spheres, she drew her curtain and pressed her face against the pane to look up into the night. Lo! The great hollow of the firmament was ablaze with red, fleecy flame. The curtain of gray was withdrawn from the immaculate earth, and its inviolate snows throbbed and blushed rose-red beneath the cor-

uscating glow of the overhanging heaven. Above, on a field of molten white, advanced and retreated the auroral hosts. Armies gleaming in prismatic hues, with streamers of green and rose, violet and gold, far afloat, were marshalling toward the zenith. Giant figures rushed onward like clouds driven before the wind, yet only to disperse and to fly back with trackless speed and banners amain into the infinite azure from whence they came. Through the ever-shifting phantasmagoria shone the steadfast stars. Ariadne's Crown was set in silver nimbus; Cassiopea's Chair was panoplied with violet lights; Capella, red and lurid, looked forth from a yellow aureola; spears of fire shot through and through the "mild influence" of the Pleiades; while the blazing arch of the zenith cast its projecting splendor southward till it spread like a veil of enchantment before the eyes of Orion.

Was this phantasmal commotion but the outermost throb of an omnipotent solar storm that moment raging more than ninety millions of miles away? Did it flash from that central sphere to her vibrating sight in the twinkling of her eyelid? Then it was not difficult to discern in matter "the promise and potency of all terrestrial life," in matter thus quickened, poised, and upheld by unerring law and omnipotent Love! "And what are we?" she asked, looking inward upon the sleeping women on the bed. "What are we but atoms of that matter kindled by a spark of the Divine Flame? held by immutable law, and saved by illimitable Love!" And human passion, human sorrow, even the mighty ache of a human heart, seemed to dwindle before the significant blaze of elemental splendor. No less the

morning dawned low and gray. There was the opaque sky. There was the wintry earth. There was the leaden atmosphere. There was the racking cough. There was life, — as it is, — and there, waiting but a little farther on, was Death.

“Why did I run the fearful risk of such a journey now?” repeated Linda in the comparative respite of one easy hour, as folded in a soft flannel wrapper of Agnes’, wrapped in shawls and propped by pillows, she leaned back into the pale sunshine which later in the day stole into Evelyn’s little front window. “I knew I must come now, or never. I had just learned where you were. I knew I should not live to see another winter; no, nor through another spring.”

“Don’t say so,” said Agnes from the depths of her pitying heart. “The journey in such weather was enough to kill you. But you have survived it, and now — when the south wind comes, the sunshine, and the wood flowers” —

“I shall go,” said Linda without emotion. “I know it. Now I am here I can say I wish it. Not but what life looks pleasanter to me than it has” — since I lost him, and knew it, she thought; but she said — “since you went away. But I am done with it, done; I know it.”

“What made you come, Linda?”

“Remorse.”

“Oh, Linda!”

“Remorse, remorse, remorse! Do you know what it is like? It” — bending forward with a hissing whisper — “it is hell! There is no other hell. I am sure of it. I don’t know where it ends, but it begins *here*,’ and she struck her heart.

"Linda," said Agnes calmly and earnestly, "you are not strong enough to bear any excitement of feeling, The slightest will bring on that dreadful cough. Let the past go! Let it all go," she said with visible emotion. "We cannot bring it back, we cannot change it, we cannot ever forget it. But we can forgive it. We can forgive it, Linda."

"Can *you* forgive it?"

"Yes. Now I can say yes with my heart and soul. I am not sure, not sure that even yesterday I could have said so without a single pang of reservation. I am so human, I — I loved him so much, Linda. But now that I see you, I forgive everything, everything; and if I have ever wronged you by even a thought, may you forgive me, and may God. But we must not talk about it. Even I am not strong enough for that — and you, it will kill you. You must *not*."

"I will," and the thin lips closed tight as of old. "I came here to talk. If it kills me, let it. It is the only chance of righteous death left to me. It's my last chance to cast off this load — this awful load here;" and she again put her hand on her heart.

"If you could know what I suffered when I did not know where you were, when I thought that I should *never* know, you would be glad now that I have this chance to cast my burden off."

"How did you find out, Linda?"

"By Mary Ben. And she would never have told me, — for I had met her many times before and she gave no hint, — but she saw how I felt, how I looked; she knew it was my last chance, and told me. And Captain Ben brought me to Boston. It was a dreadful

night; but the waves were smoother than the railroad. I thought the motion of the cars would kill me, but it did not. I was to live to reach here, and you. Why don't you ask me a single question?"

"I cannot think of one that is not too full of pain, Linda, to us both."

"Pain! I expect pain. What else have I ever had on earth? I like it, compared with remorse. You can never know how much I did to hurt you, to injure you. That's what I've come to tell, so I can die easy."

"Don't, Linda; I'm afraid to hear it. Perhaps, after all, I could not bear it. I might not be able to forgive you, Linda. Than that, I would rather never know what I had to forgive."

"If you know and don't forgive, the burden will be yours. Till I confess and ask forgiveness, 'tis mine. I can bear it no longer. I must roll it off. You must take it. You are full of life. I am almost dead."

"Forgive *me*, Linda! It is only when I think of *him*, that I fear I may not be strong enough to forgive."

"It is only when I think of *him* that I know I have sinned enough to curse my soul forever!"

"Oh, Linda, why didn't you leave us to each other? We were everything to each other at first! How could you come between us? He was all I had!"

"How could you come between *us*? He was all I had, -- all, all, all," and the sunken eyes flamed in their sockets. "Didn't I nurse him when he was a baby? Didn't I beg food for him when he would have starved, else? Didn't I worship him as a god, and drudge for *him* like the slave that I was, -- only that you, with

your soft eyes and soft voice and soft hands, when mine were as hard as horns, might lead him away from me into the moonlight under the maples at Ulm, while I sat and waited and waited alone, or followed you alone? How desolate I was. How I hated you. How I vowed that I would avenge my loss; that I would work your woe; that as you took him from me, so he should be taken from you; that if I had him not, neither should you."

"Was there no difference, Linda? He was like a brother to you. He was my husband. I loved him when I was a little girl. I never dreamed of taking him from you. I would have been willing, glad that he should be your devoted brother always."

"Brother! You never knew, you never can know, what he was to me! He was everything. I worshipped him. My life began in him and ended in him. I had no other thought. I was glad to be his slave. I would have done anything he told me to do, no matter how wicked — because I loved him. I would do anything, be anything, but give him up. Yet I had to give him up — at last. It killed me.

"He was never the same to me after you went, even before he married her. She would not have me in the house when she was married, but it was not all the thought of her that made him shrink from the sight of me. I made him think of you. I knew it. I wished him reminded of you when I saw what power she had gained. You were never a match for me, not in my way; she was. She could not conquer me, but she could kill me — by inches.

"Her power was not all of love. He loved you, I

always knew it, loved you all that he could love any woman. He was fascinated by her. You know how vain he was. Think what it must have been to him to be so flattered and followed by such a woman — so pretty, so rich, so tempting every way. She beguiled him the more, because she was fascinated by him. I really think she was at first. She got over it ; too late she thought, for she had married him, and you know she never intended to marry any man. But her power did not go with her fascination. She had too much money for that. Think what that money brought him ! Everything that he wanted most — that he had always wanted most. And with his temperament all that splendid ease was the dearer and the harder to give up because he was not born to it, and had wanted it all his life more than anything else. When he had to choose between me and his pleasures, he chose his pleasures. He would have been false to himself if he hadn't."

"I don't think that I understand you," said Agnes. "I never knew you to be in the way of his pleasures, Linda."

"Of course I never should have been if she had consented to live with me. But when she declared that I should not stay in any house where they were, he was compelled to choose between me and what she gave him. He knew very well that she would not continue to give it if he set his authority against her will. Authority ! He never had any authority with her ! I deserved better treatment of her. I sold my soul to work out her ends. I — put those two letters on the bureau that made you go away !"

"Linda !"

"I did. I was given over to the devil. Where do you think I found them? Under the blotter, between it and his desk-cover. They were so thin, they made no perceptible rise in the thick paper, yet I felt them under my finger-ends. Of course I was searching. Something was going on, I knew, and I was determined to know *just* what it was — for my own ends. She never could have married him if it had not been for me. I told her so. Her thanks were, when she got him, she turned me out of doors."

"Linda, do you realize the full import of what you are telling me — how it wrings my heart to sit here and listen to it?"

"Yes, I do. But I must tell it, and I must tell you. I can't die with it all in me, can I? I must confess. I am not a Catholic, to go to a priest. If I went to a thousand, I could not roll all the burden off till I came to you.

"I felt full of triumph when I saw you go down the lawn path with Vida that night. Of course I saw you. I put my poison on the bureau. I was not so stupid as not to watch the effect. I knew at tea that you had read the letters. How still Vida was, how softly you went out; but I heard you. I watched you till your figure was lost, down by the Sound."

"Did you feel no compunction, no pity, Linda?"

"Not then. I was too busy securing my end; too hopeful of gaining it. Fool! In spite of *her*, I did not believe that he would marry. I thought that he never could; that the law would prevent. Her lover he might be, but I — I would be the mistress of his house, with the power I wanted over him. I soon dis-

covered that if you stayed away he could get a divorce in two years. Then I depended on her aversion to marriage. It didn't amount to a straw, in the end. It came that my last chance was to make peace with her. I told her about the letters, as if my only motive in doing it was to get you out of *her* way.

"What do you think she said? She looked me steadily in the eyes and answered in the sweetest voice, 'I understand you perfectly. I read your face the first time I saw it. I felt sure that there was no end to the trouble you made, and always made, between Mr. and Mrs. King. Now I can find more agreeable employment than watching you. You know what I mean when I say that in the whole world there is not a house big enough to hold you and me. You must go. You shall have all the money that you need, but live where I am you cannot!'

"It was then he chose between me and his pleasure. 'It can't be helped, Linda,' he said. 'We are not dealing with Agnes now, but with a woman whose slightest wish has been a law ever since she was born.'

"I spurned her money — I hated it. And yet the time came at last when I could not live without it — or his; he took pity on me, and always sent it in his own name. I went back to Ulm to my trade; but at last I could not work. Yet it's not three months since I stopped."

"You were not able to work three months ago!" said Agnes with compassion.

"No, I was not able to work one year ago; but I did. The gnawing at my heart (I have a heart) was worse than all the pain in my lungs. I did not want

to think of you. The more I tried to forget you the more distinctly you came back, till at last you stayed with me all the time. If I shut my eyes, I saw you; if I opened them, I saw you. I saw you in the light, I saw you in the dark. As I grew weaker I had one thought only, how I had tried to injure you."

"You tried to help me once, Linda. I should have died in that fearful sickness if it had not been for your nursing."

"Yes. But it was my instinct for nursing, rather than any desire that you should live, that made me do it. I brought you back to life about as a cat does a mouse, to have one chance more to maul it."

"Linda, you could not have been so deliberately cruel!"

"Yes, I was. Just as I loved him, I hated you. I wanted to harm you because you had taken him. If you had not, I should never have meddled with you. You'll never know in how many ways I harmed you. I used to give him false impressions about you. I knew just how to do it. I knew him better than he knew himself. I could touch a spring that would change the whole current of his thought and feeling, and he never dream what did it. So I harmed you all the time. You knew you were harmed, but in how many ways you never imagined. You would have had some trials, no doubt, if you had been left alone; any woman would, in being his wife; but it was I who destroyed your married life. It was I who prepared the way, and made triumph not only possible but easy to Circe Sutherland. I did it — I did it."

"I have prayed over and over that I might be show

wherein I erred, wherein I might have made all different," said Agnes. "Of some things I am certain. If I had been less sensitive to his careless moods, more sunny, less silent and sad, less severe in my mental judgment of him, things would have gone better with us, I feel sure now. Then I was too young, too weak to know."

"You were not perfect," said Linda. "You moped too much — took everything too much to heart, that is certain; but if you hadn't — if you had been anything, everything that you were not, under the same conditions you would have been no match against such a nature, experience, and purpose as mine."

"What makes me sorriest is to have you say 'purpose,' Linda. The being overcome of evil I know all about; but the purpose, the fixed, cruel purpose to work another's harm I cannot understand. If you would only *not* say that, Linda."

"I must. Understand? You will never understand! Can you understand a whole life that has been one long hunger for love never satisfied? What do you know about such a life? Nothing. Do you know what it is to long with the first longing of your childish heart for a home — a true home; to grow gray, to die, yet never to have one! Do you know what it is to cry in your inmost being for a child, your very own; cry to hear a baby voice say mother, to feel baby lips clinging to your own, to feel that there is something in the world bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh; to cry for this child in silent anguish — to see it, all these, another's — never, never yours?"

"Do you know what it is to love one with your first

consciousness, to nurse him with almost baby hands, to go hungry for him, to slave for him, to bear poverty, ignominy for his sake, to sin for him, to live for him with no thought or desire in which he is not, only to see him go farther and farther from you, till wholly lost? Only to see him possessed by another, living a life with her in which you have no share; to know that while he is all the world to you, you are next to nothing to him? Could you look upon her hour by hour, see her possessing all you desired, possessing your idol — the husband, the child, the home, all hers, while you stood without, tolerated, but not desired, endured, but not needed, and not feel your heart harden within you to hate? If I could have nothing, why should you have everything? ‘You shall not,’ I said. Would you not have said it? I said it, and I did it. And I have lived to repent, and am here. When I came to see *her*, to know her, then I realized how little you had been to blame for anything that I ever endured. Then I realized how ^crueI I had been to you — how wicked. I have been a wicked woman; I know it; I might have been a better one if I had tried. I was too wretched to try. Life had wrought me a hideous wrong, I thought. I wreaked my injury upon the innocent.

“It was all for the want of a little love. Think what it would have been to you, in all your life never, never to have been truly loved once. What would it have made *you*!” and the woman’s voice went out in one long wail of anguish.

“I will love you, Linda, as long as you live,” said Agnes, taking the white face within her tender hands, the tears from her tender eyes falling upon it as she

bent and kissed the cold forehead and then the quivering lips.

“Vida!” she called; and the susceptible child, as she entered the room, feeling the atmosphere about these two women, and moved by the sight of their tears and especially by the attitude of her mother, went straight to them, and stretching her arms about both, said: “Dear mamma! dear Auntie Linda, I love you too.” Thus the old life was buried beyond the possibility of resurrection.

Athel Dane found a new object of interest in the log-house beneath the Pinnacle: a woman sick unto death, who was yet unreconciled to fate, and who faced eternity with a stoical apathy more appalling than fear.

“She has loved and suffered much, and has been most unhappy. Show her tenderly as you can the dawn of the Hereafter,” said Agnes to him with a voice full of tears; and this was the only allusion that she ever made to Linda’s past. Thus with gentle eyes and tender voice the rector of Dufferin, into whose breast it seemed had come the heart of a little child, talked with this unfortunate daughter of earth, of the final transition from death unto life which the Father grants his beloved children. He helped her to see that she “would not die in dying, any more than the plants die that wither in the later summer and shake out their seeds to send them flying on the wind, to light and spring and blossom again in the heart of another summer;” that God’s Hereafter would be granted her for love and peace no less than his Now. If in solemn unction he intoned with her the church’s

prayers for the contrite, with enkindled vision he pointed out to her the promise of help, growth, and fruition whose harvest awaits the justified beyond the sowing of these brief and stormy earthly years.

Many and many an hour of peace stole in unawares between the hours of weariness and pain. Linda breathed in a new atmosphere of forgiveness, love, trust, and of tender pity. Her last days were her best days, to a degree of content that but a short time before she would have believed impossible. Athel Dane had been sitting long by her bedside one day, when Agnes entered the room. As she met his eyes there was something in their sympathy which she had never seen before, which made her heart beat faster.

"Agnes," said Linda, "I have told Mr. Dane the story of your past — all of it. He knows everything. I have kept nothing back. My sin is ever before me — I have confessed my fault not to him, but to God. I want to drop all of my burden that I may, day by day, as I go on. It is but right that he should know how you have loved and suffered."

Athel Dane uttered not a word of sympathy. In that one swift, measureless glance his spirit told what no word could express. Mental communion, intellectual companionship, she had shared with him for months now. They had given a new value to her life. But this glance held something more — the recognition in sympathy of an awakening human heart. What had not her life measured of weariness, loneliness, sorrow, since such a glance was hers! Now like dew from heaven it fell upon her soul. When she prayed that night, she thanked God for it as for a heavenly good.

The swift glory of the Northern latter May burst in a single night upon the world. "Agnes," said Linda suddenly, as propped in her arm-chair she looked out upon the Pinnacle, a mountain of emerald transfigured in the gold of the setting sun, "Agnes, you will see Cyril sometime, perhaps before very long. I know you will. *You are his wife.* When you do see him, try to tell him how I loved him. Because I loved him too much, I grew wicked, cruel. I feel now the meaning in the Litany of 'From all inordinate and sinful affections, good Lord, deliver us.' *Inordinate*, that expresses my love for him. Could I help it? I do not know. I do not know how to love him less, even now. I am happier because I see him in the face of his child. My heart cries now with the *want* that he should know how much I loved him. He was my all. Tell him, Agnes. I am glad I am going. If I lived, I might be just as wicked to you again. I do not know. I know I love you *now*. You are sure, quite sure, that you have forgiven — everything?"

"Sure, Linda. You have grown very dear to me."

"'Through our Lord, who giveth us the victory.' How strange, Agnes, that I should understand these words through my own heart at last."

Vida came and laid her cheek against Linda's. Her golden head touched the head of snow.

"My darling, my *own* darling!"

The after rays of the sun shot upward as at its rising. Wood, lake, Pinnacle — the new earth in the breathing freshness of its tender bloom, took on a swift overflowing radiance. Old things had passed away. All had become new.

"It is morning. How glad I am," said Linda with a long sigh and with uplifted eyelids, which slowly closed in peace.

"My darling," said Agnes, drawing the golden head away with tender awe, "your Auntie Linda has gone home."

CHAPTER XXX.

REAPING.

It stirred scarcely a ripple of surprise in Cyril King's world, when the inhabitants thereof were told that 'King had had a stroke.' Almost invariably the reply was, "Just what I expected. No man can live as fast as he has for the last ten years, and live out half his days." At flood-tide of what such men as he call "pleasure," sudden paralysis came. Midnight suppers, smoking, drinking, night turned into day, mental excitement plied by such explosive ammunition — all fulfilled their end, not slowly, but swiftly and surely. Avenging nature, through inevitable law, struck its certain blow, and at the prime of his years Cyril King found himself smitten, old, his active career ended.

Half the horror of this fact might have been lost in unconsciousness. Fate with its taunt of irony denied this consolation. While half his body was virtually dead, and the other half punctured with myriad fangs of diseased nerves, his brain flourished, sharpened by its very irritation into torturing acuteness. If he could have applied this abnormal keenness to mental uses tending toward the old ambitious ends, he would have been conscious of some compensation for the fearful load of physical pain which he now bore without respite or reward. The fire of pleasurable sensation was

burned out. From its smouldering crater, it was impossible that a strong, clear, intellectual flame should rise. He might have been returned to Congress as long as he chose to retain his seat there, for with all his misdoings his magnetism of manner and of temperament had held all his early popularity with the people. They saw him and listened to him, with a glamour of oratory hovering about him. They heard vague stories of his personal life, which made him seem like a hero of romance ; of the real truth of that life they knew little and cared less. Counting by popular favor, it seemed as if he might step without hindrance to the highest round of political success.

All the while he had one insidious foe undermining his power, making ruin sure ; that foe was himself. He had been proposed as a United States Senator, when the irrevocable fiat of a council of physicians declared that he must choose between life and the excitement of another political campaign ; and furthermore, that if elected, the state of his health utterly forbade his filling the coveted and honorable seat. Thus, when his political future showed the most dazzling auguries, he suddenly stepped down and out of its splendor.

Strange as it may seem, he was missed longer from the legislative body, in which he made one imperial presence, one potential voice, than he was from the gay, convivial world of pleasure, of which it was his weakness to believe he was an indispensable member. Long after he had gone forever from the legislative hall, frequenters of its galleries would inquire for "that handsome member, King," for "that eloquent fellow from —, who made the telling speech for compromise," and

send forth a real sigh of regret when told that they would never behold him there or listen to him more. Thus he was long remembered in connection with the seat which he had made almost illustrious with a splendid personality ; though, through lack of moral grandeur, the remembrance held no element of enduring fame. But the swift currents of political events bear the grandest individuality out of sight with a painful rapidity. Too soon for his own peace, Cyril King had occasion to realize how swiftly the gap closes over when one steps from the rushing tide of active occupation. Even he, Cyril King, was scarcely missed. His old comrades remembered him ; they proved it often by saying, " Poor King ! How has the mighty fallen ! " But they got on just as well without him. The world, — his own particular world, in which he deemed himself an hereditary monarch, — it scarcely took note of his fall. His kingdom flourished while he sat crownless. And who flourished more triumphantly than its queen, Circe ! No tint of all her personal loveliness had faded. She was a woman who " knew how to take care of herself." It was her supreme object in existence. Kingdoms might rise and fall ; fire, pestilence, famine desolate the earth ; her closest friend fall dead by her side ; just the same, the supreme business of her life was " to take care of herself." No human being ever achieved more perfect success in a single direction. But in the process, she had not left a ray of glamour hovering about her face, her words, or her ways, to the man whom she once enthralled and led captive.

" What is sauce for the gander is equally sauce for the goose," she said incisively, one evening when she

heard from the lips of Cyril a word of impatience, at her usual evening exclamation of —

“I must go.”

“Where?” he asked.

“To the French minister’s.”

“Can’t you stay at home one night?”

“Well, no, I don’t think I can.”

“I’m sorry my society has come to be of so little account.”

“I never pretended that the society of one man was sufficient to me. It isn’t, any more than the society of one woman was enough for you — any way a sick one. I’m sure you know by long experience what a bore the ceaseless company of one ailing woman can be? Pardon me, but I can’t say that the society of an ailing man is any more delightful. You know precisely what you would do if I were sick and you were well. You would leave me to my own meditations chiefly. I shall do the same. If I sat down here for the whole blessed evening, we should just mope together and yawn, and grow more and more tired of each other every minute. If I go, when I come back I shall have something bright to tell you, and it will be your variety to — see me! There is Mose to move you and to read to you. You don’t need me any more than I do you. Freedom, you know, is the one absolute privilege of existence to me, as well as to you. We both practised it long together. For the first time, it is my privilege to pursue it alone. I must confess it is just as sweet to me as when we pursued it together;” and Circe, disburdening her mind of this small oration, stood revolving before a pier-glass, gratifying herself with the glit-

ter of her jewels, and the undulating fall of her voluminous robe.

"It hangs right, don't it?" she asked, pirouetting before the extension chair on which Cyril was lying back.

"I'm not a modiste. Ask your maid."

"No. You're a mope. Cyr," suddenly catching the gleam of the emerald on her finger, "do you believe in *our* stone now? What geese we were. 'Success in love'! *Ciel!* it's a century since I tested mine. I've a mind to try to-night, just once more, to see if it has lost its ancient spell."

The old wave of passionate heat flushed the white face of the invalid man. His steel-blue eyes flamed in their shadowy sockets with a strange light. Her words sent him too far into the past to make it possible for him to catch in an instant the tone of the mocking present.

"The retrospect don't please you?" she said, turning from the mirror and looking him full in the face. 'Ah well," with a long sigh of inexpressible fatigue, "it can't tire you more than it does me, — the looking back. Why didn't we have our love-passage, live through it, and then be free, both to go as we listed? I didn't want to marry, you know. That I did, in spite of myself, proves that your emerald was mightier than mine, that once. 'Tis now. Much you care for me, only to amuse you and" — to pay your bills, she thought, but was still too polite to say. "You are moping for the little wren who flew away from your nest. And she is moping for you somewhere, I am sure of it. *Oison!* That was I to ever meddle with her."

"I wish to God you had never meddled with *me*," said Cyril, closing his eyes as if to shut out the sight of her tantalizing beauty.

"The woman thou gavest me, she tempted me, and I did eat, runs the ancient fable. Of course you didn't *want* to eat. Oh, no!" said Circe, throwing herself on a divan, with robes afloat, white arms folded, and child-mouth mocking now.

"Yes I did, curse me!" answered Cyril, with decisive bitterness.

"Well, you've survived it. And now you deserve to be eaten, yourself, for your ingratitude."

"Ingratitude?"

"Yes, ingratitude. Where would you be to-day, and what would you be, without the luxuries which *now* are indispensable to you? Though you did manage to live without them once, if I am to believe the story of your gentle cousin."

She had applied her most exquisite instrument of torture now. With one delicate blow she sent it quivering down to the sorest spot in his heart. She was indolently amiable, and preferred never to wound the feelings of any one, when her own pride was not wounded. This he had done. She, the queen of "Affinities," would allow no man to accuse her of "meddling" with him, and remain unpunished. The accusation in its repulsive form rankled more and more in her mind. She drew herself up from her reclining posture. Her small head curved and quivered like a beautiful serpent's. Her jetty eyes glowed with inward fire, the thin nostrils quivered, the flexile lips dilated outward with scorn, and the small chin grew more and more

pointed with contempt, as she went on ; her voice, not raised one vibration, seemed to struggle upward, and out from unfathomable depths of passion within.

“ Meddle with you ! You may be sure that I never would have meddled with you, if I had known who you were. As I met you, how was I to know, pray, that you were a low-born beggar, — yes, a born beggar ; the spawn of a drunken blacksmith ! While I, — I hold the oldest blood of Scotland and the proudest blood of France in my veins. I was born to reign ! And you ! what have you that I have not given you ! ”

“ Myself.” The godlike head drew upward from the smitten body, and Cyril King “ looked every inch a king.” “ Myself. And my father, blacksmith, drunkard though he was, is dearer to me this moment than you are, madam.”

“ No doubt. Everything to its kind,” and the delicate chin pointed, and the beautiful lips curled with ineffable scorn.

He saw their expression. It was insufferable beyond the possibility of any spoken word to be. It maddened him.

“ It is womanly, isn’t it, to sit and insult a man because you have him at your mercy ? If you hadn’t, I — would throttle you, I would, if you dared to look at me like that, but you never did.”

“ No. It took time to penetrate to the hidden beauties of your character, and to discover the splendor of your antecedents. It was your amiable cousin who divulged the latter. She knew nothing could madden me more. It was the revenge she chose, when I refused to make her the custodian of my secrets, and the

go-between that you allowed her to be in your establishment. Now if you had only employed the herculean strength that you had then, to throttle *her*, you would have conferred a blessing on me, and you yourself would be elsewhere this evening. It was she who put those ridiculous letters of ours on your wife's bureau. She told me so. Yet the very woman whose happiness she ruined in life took care of her in death. Let nobody talk to me of the law of compensation; it is *nil*."

"What do you mean, madam?"

"I mean that your mischief-making cousin, Ethelinda Kane, is dead, and that Agnes King, or whatever her name may be, was the woman who nursed her till she died, — at least I have reason to believe that she did," and Circe, rising, went to a writing-desk drawer, took from it a newspaper, and handed to Cyril, saying: "It came on one of your worst days, months ago, so I saved it for you."

It was an Ulm journal. Cyril opened it and read:—

"Died, May 31, at Tarnstone, Province of Quebec Ethelinda Kane, of this city, aged forty-three years."

"I fancy your own thoughts will be all the company that you will want for a while. *Bon soir*," said Circe, in a tone of even sweetness, through which thrilled the certain *timbre* of triumph, and with these words she glided out of the room.

An hour later she sat in the drawing-room of the French minister. One slender, satin-covered foot peered and patted out from the flounces of her robe. The pink flesh-tints of her dimpled arms were thrown out in lustrous relief by the soft blackness of the lace

which enveloped her. A small tiara of emeralds and diamonds blazed above her coils of black hair, beneath which the lovely face looked forth with a dazzling fairness all its own. The talismanic emerald shone on the uncovered hand, which, fresh and rosy as a child's, toyed with a fan also set with the same gems, above whose glancing sheen the low-lidded eyes were sending out the old alluring glances — old as time, yet ever young — to the responding eyes of a young Austrian baron, who, banished from his princely home for reckless dissipation, now, with equal astonishment and delight, found in the wilds of Washington beauty as exquisite, grace as consummate, and voice as seductively low, as he had ever met in the courts of kings.

"It is my birth-month stone," Circe was just murmuring with a downward glance at the emerald on her finger, when she was confronted by Mrs. Peppercorn, who paused before the sofa on which she and the baron sat.

"Pardon my interruption," said the senatress, "but how is Mr. King?"

"Oh, so much better, thank you," was the answer in sweetest tones. "He drove out this afternoon, and as so nearly himself again, he insisted on my leaving him for a short time this evening. I left him enjoying his newspaper, so you may imagine how nearly well he is."

"I can imagine," replied her enemy tersely, and passed on.

"*Ogresse Américaine!*" murmured Circe to the baron, with a pretty shrug of her white shoulders.

Once life gave to Cyril King variety till it brought satiety. The days and the nights were all alike to him now. As he lay back after Circe left him, he lay through nearly all his waking and sleeping hours, alone. His valet waited within sound of his bell. His carriage waited for the occasional days when he was able to ride out. Circe made him brief daily calls amid her "rush" of engagements. After dressing for opera, party, or ball, she would sit an hour with him in full costume. She had not the slightest compunction about going out precisely as she did when he was in full health. At present he was not "dangerously sick." His health was only shattered for life. He was cut off forever from active employment and enjoyment in the midst of his days. With preternatural clearness of mental vision he perceived at once the glory of life's fruition and the impossibility of its possession. He lived now in retrospection and introspection. His future had no horizon.

At last he knew what it was to be alone. Since his birth he had never felt so alone as to-night. Circe's evening call usually ended as it began, in polite and smiling indifference. They had gained a perfect knowledge of each other. The infatuation each threw over the other had long before worn itself out. Under no possible condition could the homage of any one man have been sufficient long to such a nature as Circe's. Vanity, power, pleasure, were more to her than love alone in any guise. He had nothing now to give her that she wanted. His glorious beauty, which enthralled her most, was gone. She had more for him than he **had** for her, — wealth with its boundless tributaries: ar

undimmed loveliness of person, a spell of attractiveness in her presence ; many mental gifts and graces. All these he dreamed once were to be solely his ; he knew better now. How often she made him feel that the hours she spent with him were trist and flavorless.

Words of fretful ennui had often passed between them, but they had never risen to anger, much less rage, before to-night. He had spoken brutally to her, he was miserably aware of that. But who — surely not he — could bear that look of unutterable disdain which her face wore, and not feel the impulse to blot it out? Especially when he remembered what caused it — his wretched antecedents. Was he never to outlive their reproach? Was the shadow which poverty and misfortune cast at his birth to stretch athwart all sun-shine on his path, down to the very grave? He had thought that it lay far behind, — that gloomy shadow, — that it could never overtake him again. Never since the lady almoners of Ulm had patronizingly reminded him of his untoward beginnings had any mortal recalled them in his presence till now. When he believed them buried, forgotten, they confronted and taunted him again, on the lips, and in the scorn, of the woman whom the world called his wife. He had betrayed the one holy love of his life, and yet his heart had never swerved in fidelity of yearning love toward the vagabond father, the dream-like young mother, who had loved him and left him to the mercy of the world. At least in filial duty he had not failed. His father and mother were beyond his help, but all that he could give them he gave years before, in the splendid monument which above their dust mocked their life.

recorded their names and their sole child's devotion.

The last taunt upon them had come back through Linda — Linda at first the blessing, and then the bane, of his life. Linda dead! He held the paper before his eyes with the one hand left for using now, and read over and over by his shaded lamp the unmistakable record of her departure. It was useless to deny it, he felt that with her a portion of himself had gone out of the world. One of blood was to him an indissoluble bond. She had wrought him dole. Yet without her at the beginning he could not have lived at all. He loved her, selfishly always, according to his nature. She gave herself to evil; but it was for him. She sinned; it was because she loved him. She worked the misery of others; she had not done it if she had not loved him too well. The one spring of motive and action in her life had been her love for him. She was parted from him, and died. Amid silken cushions and furniture of ebony and gold, amid soft lights and perfumes, all that luxury could bestow, the mind of the man saw only the bare floor, the wooden chairs, the wretchedness of the little up-stairs tenement in Ulm, and in it a young girl toiling and going hungry for a little boy; and as he saw it, with the insistent vividness of reality, the paper shook in his hand, and the still powerful frame shook with slow, convulsive sobs.

From this same past emerged another form, — the form of the child Agnes, who dawned upon the eyes of the ragged boy with the face of an angel; then the girl Agnes, the love of his first youth; then the wife Agnes, fresh, fair, and happy, as she was at first. —

wan, worn, and sorrowful, as he saw her last. Thus she stood before him now, as she stood that last evening in the door of Lotusmere, robed in pure white, her soft eyes lifted to his with pitiful beseeching as he turned to go, and with whom? His eyes had never looked upon her since, and yet, had he lived through a single day that did not bring her back as he saw her there, as she stood before him now? "I reap as I sowed," he said, with a heavy groan, as if he spoke to her. Nature gave neither sob nor tear to the assuaging of this pain.

There are moments, even in the lives of the most self-loving, when the veil of selfishness drops off, and the eyes of the soul, introverted, see it as it is. To a nature like Cyril King's this moment could never come while his senses were in the ascendancy. The happiness of the one loved best, how small a drop that had been in the balance of his desire, beside the crowding weight of his own self-seeking. How distinctly he saw it now. How keenly he felt it, how bitterly he regretted it. Yet would he ever have seen it or felt it, or regretted it, if he had not come to know by bitter experience the very want and loneliness which he once so carelessly ignored, and wilfully discarded in her? Would the flattered, the all-conquering Cyril have ever realized the desolation to which he once doomed another, had not he himself sat down in its ashes? God is just. Fate had brought him at last where he could behold himself and not another.

That night, in the log-house at Tarnstone, a light burned late. Contrary to her custom at that hour,

Agnes was not asleep beside her child. A candle burned low on the little stand by Vida's bed. In its flickering light Agnes sat, her arms locked tight, her head bent forward, her eyes fixed upon the face of the sleeping girl. There was nothing weird or overwrought in her aspect, nothing wild or fevered in her gaze. Yet it was full of meaning, and the strong emotion which she could not quite keep down welled through her eyes in an expression of unutterable tenderness. The girl, as if conscious of this look of love brooding above her, stirred in her sleep, and smiled. As she did so she threw her arms above her head, framing within them her beautiful face. The veined lids with their dark, curling lashes shut in the eyes that were her mother's, and with these invisible, every tint, outline, and feature seemed to repeat her father's. There was the Greek profile, the rose-leaf on snow of the complexion, the crinkling yellow hair, like spun gold.

"His face, *his*, before time or evil had touched it," said Agnes, as she bent hers nearer to the one on the pillow. "Can I, *can* I give you up, my darling, my heart's life, my all? Yes, for him. He must have you soon, I feel it. It is he who needs you now. He is sick. I am strong. Nature has healed me."

We look upon her face as she leans forward, and see that this is true. Nature's bloom is upon her cheeks, its clear light in her eyes. The wan, weary, and ailing woman belonged to a world of discords and of pain. This woman lives in concord with harmonious elements and simple nature. The seasons are her ~~min-~~sters, her closest companions the sunshine, the moun-

tain airs, the myrrh and frankincense of the summer woods. Pure physical health radiates from her in every tint and outline. The pure health of the soul shines through the steadfast eyes. If a lingering sadness looks through them still, it is the sadness of one who sheds a tear over human fate even while she conquers it. Vida turns her face toward her mother as if to draw nearer to her, and as she does so her likeness to her father is startlingly apparent. It was as if he emerged suddenly from the far past, with the dew of youth and the freshness of innocence still upon his face. As Agnes gazed she held her hand tight upon her heart, and two slow tears rolled down her cheeks.

"My love, my only love," she murmured. "So I remember you. Why was I not more patient, more forbearing, more hopeful? I might have saved our love from wreck. Now you are smitten, afflicted, and by man's law I have no right to go to you, to help you, to nurse you, to make you sure how utterly I love you. Our child can go. She can go and look upon you with her mother's eyes, and I — I can live alone — yes, to the end. But my soul yearns over you, and for you. My heart cries for you, and cannot be comforted."

Mary Ben's last letter had stirred the heart of Agnes from peace into tumult. It repeated the tale rife in Lotusport, that had appeared indeed in the Lotusport "Argus," that the distinguished member whose brilliant talents had reflected such lustre on the favored place of his nominal habitation, to the great grief of the community, had been suddenly struck by paralysis and had lost all use of his left side. But Mary Ben

with palpable delight added other whispers which had not yet been caught up in the air by the omnipresent "Argus."

"They do say," wrote Mary Ben, "that he ben't happy at home; that the fine huzzy who does dare to call herself by his name does pay small heed to him, now that he does really need her. She goes to routs, an' fine doings, more than ever before, an' week in an' out he is left alone with his man. And they do say, too, that she will sail to Europe soon, she is that tired of him now he is ailin'. An' I have all this straighter nor you would think, straight from Judy Harvey herself, whose mistress told it right afore her, an' she knows, for it was with her, you know, that Miss Sutherland used to stay. You may reprove me, but it is not in my power to sorrow that now his turn has come. The house has no tenant now, an' I do put flowers on the blessed little grave regular."

The one gleam of comfort which this letter held for Agnes was its dim promise that Circe was going away. Her presence caused not only emotional, spiritual, and mental conflict and confusion, but by no power could Agnes adjust any thought or feeling to the fact of her presence at all. The moment that she could even antedate her absence, her heart's horizon began to grow clear. Then at least he could have his child.

"Yet what folly to depend on anything so vague," her reason at last compelled her to say. "If she goes to Europe, he in all probability will go also. The change may benefit him. Alas! what could he do but suffer, if he remained!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

AWAKENING.

It was June again. It was one year since Linda died. Her grave in the meadow close by the wood was covered thick with violets. It was protected by a paling, and at its head was a white marble tablet, bearing these words: —

ETHELINDA.

SHE LOVED MUCH.

Amid the dew and balm and bloom of a June morning, Agnes stood by this grave to bid it, and all that her eyes beheld, farewell. The hour had come for the uprooting of more than seven years of life, whose invisible fibres struck deep into the very soil and clung with tenacious tenderness to every inanimate object which met her gaze. From the turmoil of her days, from the trouble of her own heart, she fled hither. Here she came back to nature. Here she mixed with the elements. Here she lived, without thinking of it, the slow, serene, silent life which gave simplicity to human character, and symmetry and splendor to human thought, when the world was young. In the stillness of this solitude the complex torments of a false existence faded out. Here the crushing weight of love's anguish was laid down. Here the simple elements of a pure and

natural life had been wrought into physical health, moral strength, intellectual power, and the deepest charity of heart. Here through great nature's soul crept the human bond, ever lengthening, ever binding, of human fellowship, without which our closest kinship with nature fails of its full completeness. Here no hurry, no "rush," no tumult of action or of place had blurred the outlines of distinct events, or run life's experiences all together into one dim mass of memory. Time had grown slow of step. In these seven years there was abundant room for each thought, object, and sensation to take and to hold its own place. Each now shone out clear in her consciousness, luminous with its own indwelling lustre. By resolving life back to the simplest elements of living, she made the minutest and keenest realization of life possible. By escape from the confusion of too complex activity, she found time for a broader and calmer consciousness. She stood receptive to the simplest and the subtilest impressions from visible forms, and the invisible essence of things. Because there was space for every faculty, thought, and emotion, not one was cheated. She came to be conscious of an intense realization of life through all its purest attributes, and of that keen delight in simple existence which seems to be the exclusive monopoly of unblunted childhood or undimmed youth. Through the equilibrium of material and spiritual forces, her nature was modulated to harmony, and she stood pure and free, in the conscious fruition of being. What was hers was hers to the utmost. Not a flush on the mountain, not a light on the lake, not a tint in the foliage, not a flower that she had loved and tended like a sentient

thing from its spring birth to its autumn bed under the gathered leaves and coverlet of fir branches, that would not go away with her as an individual entity.

"I may never see you again," she said, looking around as if she were speaking to friends; "but I hold you each and all, eternal possessions. In my memory, and in my heart of hearts, you will never grow dim. Wherever I go you will go also, fair spot of earth!"

If with a sense of wrenching pain she turned from inanimate objects, how much deeper was the pang of farewell to the friends who had given to her personal life in this solitary spot all its human interest and affection. Her head and heart were full of delightful purposes for the future happiness of Evelyn and Jim. No matter how far distant she might be, she could benefit them still. For the future of Athel Dane the parting moment essayed no such assuaging thought. Their friendship would remain, but its hours of personal communion were at an end. Henceforth their separate ways must diverge further and further apart. Afar off, she could follow him with gratitude and gentle remembrance. These were small returns indeed, for all that he had given her.

What had he given her? Since Linda's death, utter recognition, sympathy entire, — silent in expression, delicate in deed, pervasive as the atmosphere. For more than a year she had lived in the consciousness of being surrounded and supported by an ever-present kindness, that made itself manifest in acts alone; but how eloquent were those acts in thoughtfulness and unspoken sympathy. She had long ceased to perceive Athel Dane in any professional form, or in any phase

extraneous to the simple man. Of the largess of his nature he had given spontaneously and without stint. His rugged strength, his large knowledge, his richly embellished mind, his sympathy, virginal and quick in its lately kindled, cumulated power, — a strong nature in the first dawn of its entire consciousness, — had he not without a word laid all at her feet ?

How grateful she was, now that the last day of their personal association seemed past, that through it all she had been enabled to hold her friend as God's most sacred gift. It seemed to her that the holiest trust a soul could receive was the keeping in any degree of another's nature. Next to her child, now, her most sacred trust was her friend. So far as she influenced him at all, she must answer to her conscience for that influence. It is so easy to be a drag on another's soul ; so easy to hang a weight on the heart that loves us ; so easy to chill, to wound, to disappoint, to be half false, to tempt to some excess, though ever so slight, of word or deed, even the dearest ! Had she never failed, through some human lack or limitation ? She could not say that she never had. She felt sure only that with unfaltering will she held the soul of her friend aloft in the pure sunlight, and never preyed upon it. Thus in loneliness, in lack of sympathy, in lack of love, in the hunger for affection that will beset the strongest heart, in regret, in sorrow, in silence, in speech, in tears and laughter, with nature or with society, her friend was her friend always, and to her only her friend.

As Athel Dane rode toward the Pinnacle that afternoon, he thought the woods had never seemed so paradisiacal before. Surely their freshness was Edenic

They were flushed with the dewy glory of a new world of bloom. The white star of the strawberry flower gleamed through the malachite grass, and the raspberry bushes held up their creamy clusters of blossoms on either hand. The sod by the road was set thick with violets of every tint, snow-white streaked with purple, yellow, and the purest ultramarine. The showy orchis was royal in her velvet snood. And the pale tresses of maiden hair, and the emerald feathers of the ferns, gently swinging in the blue air, gave a sense of calm and of motion that was at once vivifying and inspiring. The minor chords of nature, from which autumn evokes the tenderest music of the universe, were still. Instead, the airy dome of the forest seemed to palpitate with the universal joy of whole nations of birds who came back with the spring, to jubilate in their best beloved home.

Athel Dane's thoughts reverted to his first ride through this forest. It came back a palpable presence, that wondrous autumn day. He saw its golden film, he inhaled its fragrance, he heard the monotones of its music. Perfect it was in its kind. But its hectic hues, its filmy light, its faint intonations seemed sad indeed, beside the fulness of utterly awakened life, the youth of this day. And to him, there was a contrast as keenly defined between the man who rode through these woods that day, and he who basked now in the freshness of this day of June. Surely there was a film that enveloped like an atmosphere that man's perceptions. His nature spoke in half-tones, or was silent. Now, on a high, bright plane of being, he seemed in complete possession of life. That self which waited so long dormant in *nebulæ*, — holding in 'tself in unconscious

suspension the slowly quickening seeds of future activities, — it had burst the film of custom, of caste, and of craft at last, and in God's spring air and sunshine, and in his hours of shadow, in solitude and in society, everywhere, it bore the finest fruitage of character. He was full of good-will and of enkindling kindness to every one who needed such helpful gifts, and he found that many did.

It is so easy to be kind and helpful when one is happy, he thought. And then he fell to wondering why he was so much happier than he used to be; why, when for twenty-seven years he found nothing in mental theory or in actual experience that brought him real inward satisfaction, it now took so little to make him positively happy. A snatch of blue sky, the blossoming earth, an embowered vista through the woods, each filled him with a sense of keen delight. Whither did that vista lead? Athel Dane was not pinning himself down to a question in involved analyses. It suited his mood better to sum up his innocent joys, and to thank God that he had the capacity at last to find them in simple things. So Athel Dane said to himself, as he looked on and thought how that fragrant wood road led to his winsome pupil, to his dear friend, to the primitive life of the Pinnacle. Its atmosphere was peace. He sought with devout thankfulness this refuge from the selfishness, the tramping haste, the limitations and disappointments of the world. Here for an hour he renewed his strength, and girded himself anew for the race with his fellow-athletes. So much he said to himself, and every word was true.

Why does the human mind so often choose to be

blind? Or when its eyes of consciousness are opened, why does it so often shut them again and shrink back in utter cowardice from the one pivotal truth of its being? The central fact in Athel Dane's mind now was, that the log-house at the Pinnacle was to him the focal point of every human interest, the deepest spring of every heavenly aspiration. The moment had not yet come when he must confess this to himself. Now, he shrank in fear from its faintest inward suggestion.

As he passed out of the woods, he wondered why he did not see Vida with her white frock afloat, coming to meet him. She was giving a last glance at her Sallust, perhaps, and did not see him. Then it seemed strange that no Evelyn appeared to lead his horse under shelter, as she invariably did, although there was not the slightest necessity for her doing it. Now, no living being was visible, and the door of the house was closed. He knocked, but no one answered. Then he lifted the latch and went in. The rooms, unchanged, were empty of any human presence. No glinting Vida, glancing to and fro with her humming-bird motions. No soft-eyed friend, no bustling Evelyn, no wondering Jim. But on the stand by the door, there was a small package that seemed a book under cover, and on top of it a note directed to himself. He opened it and read: —

“MY DEAR FRIEND, — Since I saw you one week ago, I have received a letter which impels me to leave this dear place at once. I go to take Vida to her father, who is sick and alone, and needs his child. I judge from Linda's words in your presence that she told you the reason why I cannot obey the impulse of my heart,

and go to him and cherish him in his need also. It is not through indifference that I go without seeing you again. Farewells are hard to bear, and it seems to me best that each of us should be spared the pain of this one. Vida is frantic with grief because she must go. She seizes her pets and weeps and laments over them in tones that quite undo me. If, in addition, I had to witness her parting with her beloved teacher, I fear that I should be unfitted for all that lies before me, to do and to bear. Dear as this place is to me, I feel that I cannot return to it again without my child. In a few days I shall sail for Europe. We may never meet again; but I shall never forget you. I shall never forget that you have given guidance and instruction to my child; friendship, companionship, and sympathy to her mother. In this world I can never pay the great debt I owe you. But through every stress of time and change, my friend will be always my friend, not to have or to hold, but to pray for and to remember."

He opened the packet, also directed to himself, and found within a new library copy of "The Annals of a Quiet City," with the following words written on the fly-leaf: —

For

ATHEL DANE,

With the grateful friendship of its writer,

AGNES DARCY.

It fell from his hand. Agnes' apparent lack of enthusiasm for his favorite book always annoyed him when he thought of it. And the more sympathetically

he learned her mind, the more he wondered at this seeming defect in her appreciation. It was all revealed now. These pictures of life, these thoughts, were her very own. As the outflow of her own soul she bequeathed them to him now in parting. It was all of herself that she could give him. All? The room was still eloquent of her, — the pictures, the lichen brackets on the wall, the moss basket swinging in the sunshine of the open window, the piano, the low chair, the work basket. Such work as it might contain he had often seen; such work as was shut between the covers of this book he had never seen, of its possibility he had never dreamed.

For nearly two years he had been a weekly visitor in this house. He had looked through and through, he thought, the transparent soul of the woman who filled it with an ever growing charm; measured the mind which he knew gave of its own grace to every thought it touched; and thanked God for the spiritual nature, pure and deep, of whose presence he was never conscious without a sense of hushed and tender awe. Yet here were depths of thought which he had never perceived, wells of feeling into which his plummet had never gone down, spiritual insight and inspiration which he had never reached; and all had their source in the soul of one who beyond his ken had yet become the one central thought of his being.

“Dolt!” he exclaimed, “I had eyes, yet I saw not; ears, yet I heard not the finest symphonies of her spirit. Blind with self-conceit, stultified with a consciousness of masculine superiority, I could not perceive how much of Himself God could shut within one woman’s

nature." In his rebound from overweening self-consciousness he did himself injustice. His just awakened sight perceived her with a freshness and clearness of recognition which is not often granted to a soul shut within its house of clay, and revealed in the half lights only of its mortal condition. Rarely is one complex nature more broadly discerned by another than was that of Agnes Darcy by Athel Dane. He turned upon himself solely because he had failed to follow this soul to the last limit of its inspiration.

Even now it was for her vanished presence that his man's heart cried. Everything that her hand had touched spoke for her. The door would open presently and she come forth. He must see her dear face again. He must listen to her voice once more. Gone! gone forever! It was not possible. He could not have it so. He could not live without her. He could not even try. He sat like one stunned. The silence was dreadful. The loud, careless buzz of a great fly, droning through it out to the sunshine, struck him like a sting. The simple delight of nature's unthinking thing had power to torture now one of God's grandest creatures. Why this pain? Why did it seem that a death-blow had struck to the very centre of life, that a portion of that which was himself was already dead? Why? And the imperious will clenched the heart and made it answer. What was this woman to him, that even the impulse to live seemed to have gone with her! He had never uttered to her one word of love. He had never thought of love as a possible experience between himself and her. She had drawn him toward her being, as light draws to itself

the forms of nature, to transmute, irradiate, and purify them. In his conscious thought he had known that she was personally dear to him, dearer indeed than any one human being had ever been before.

He did not think that this was acknowledging much, for he remembered that he had never loved any one with a strong personal affection. It seemed to him that this accepted relationship, just as it was, was never to suffer change; was never to be interfered with by any of the ordinary events of human life. He was to go on studying, preaching, ministering, and at last peacefully to grow gray, and old, and die, at Dufferin. Agnes Darcy would live on to the end of her days at the Pinnacle. By and by, a long time on, her dark locks would bleach white, her light step would grow slow and feeble; but she would be more than ever beautiful to him; he should come to the Pinnacle just the same, and talk with her in the sunshine of the serene life past, and of the serener life waiting just before. In this forecast of the future Vida never grew too old to be taught. She was ever the same perverse and lovesome child, and he, her teacher, was delighted with her acute intelligence and swift absorption of any knowledge that he chose to bring. All this was desire clothed upon with the semblance of verity. Had he reasoned he would have owned that all this could never prove true; but he did not reason. He desired so intensely that this dear life should never change, that at last it seemed to him that it never could. In this seeming he said: "Her friendship is dearer to me than any other woman's love could be. If I can see her face, if I can listen to her voice, if I can know always

that she cares for me as she does now, I shall be content, and never sigh for a home, or nearer ties, or a more entire relationship." He believed this still. There seemed a piercing cruelty in its truth as he read again her letter. His fair plan of life had collapsed, he sat amid its ruins. It was gone, it was ended. It was as dead to his daily joy as if it had never been. Through the first benumbing shock struck the sharp consciousness that she had gone suddenly and utterly out of his life. He was conscious of nothing now save that he had lost her. Possession he had never asked or expected. But he had lost that which was all in all to him—her presence. For this his whole nature cried with a yearning that could not be uttered. With a mighty groan he threw his face forward, and in his anguish of spirit the darkness and the light were the same to him.

Jim Dare surveyed him thus in the open door, with his head bowed upon his arm and his face hidden. Jim had been left to "look after things," with the injunction from Evelyn that he was to come up from the field when he thought it was time for the rector to arrive, in order to tell that gentleman all he knew of the sudden departure. It would have been better for Athel Dane, perhaps, if he had come sooner. There would have been less time then for realization. Now, as the heavy step passed from the soft turf to the doorstep it brought Athel Dane to a sudden sense of appearances. He lifted his face, little dreaming how haggard it looked, and guilelessly thought to delude this shrewd son of his mother into an impression the opposite of the real one, that came to him with the

first glimpse of the bowed head and almost prostrate form.

"It is strange to find this house empty and silent," he said, and started at the unnatural sound of his own voice. "I have been spending the time till somebody came, in my own meditations."

"I see you have, an' I judge by your looks they've ben mighty onpleasant," was Jim's mental observation. But personally he felt great respect for the rector, and his audible comment was: "Wall, I'd think it must seem tol'able strange, not to find no one. I come up to tell ye. They was awful sorry to go off without seein' on ye. Vidy did take on dreadful. But you see Mis' Darcy got a letter tellin' of sickness, an' she wanted to take the train to-night. 'They're pooty nigh the Lake by this time,'" said Jim with an honest sigh. "I can't bear the sight of this room, myself, without 'em: I jest can't. Stay till mother comes if you want to, Mr. Dane, but I guess I'll go back to my hoein'."

Athel Dane was thankful to be alone again. Nevertheless the realistic presence of Jim had recalled him from the semi-consciousness of sorrow in which he might else have remained for hours. He measured every fact now with the keenest realization, yet with a sense of dull pain which seemed to him insensibility. He did not know that it was the reactionary torpor of extreme suffering.

"I shall come hither often," he said, looking about the room. "I shall make this place my shrine. Here I can recall her eyes, her voice, the words that she said, the very tones in which made them dear. Her

memory will be more to me than the presence of others." And thus with one long, lingering gaze, he turned slowly away and departed, with all the grief, though without the sin, with which Adam went out of Paradise.

The evening shadows were sifting through the umbrage of the trees as Athel Dane rode slowly back through the forest. He was glad that all the morning splendor had faded from the world, for it had gone out in his heart. Yet in all the desolation a voice perpetually spoke that seemed sweet with comfort. Through all that desolate ride it said over and over: "Through every stress of time or change my friend will be always my friend, not to have or to hold, but to pray for and to remember."

Jim Dare illustrated the average treatment which the most sacred individual experiences receive from the tongues of the outside community, when leaning over the counter of the Dufferin post-office he made a picture for Stella Moon of the Dufferin rector as he beheld him when he first arrived from the field. "I knowed he'd feel awful bad, but I didn't think he'd be so clean cut up, if Mis' Darcy did go away. 'Twarn't no kind o' use, you see. She allus kep' Mister King's pictur' by her, an' was lookin' at it every chance she could git. Many's the time I've seen her through the winder. She couldn't look both ways to once, ef 't'other one was the Dufferin rector."

Could Athel Dane have heard this speech, which so summarily disposed of the deepest experience of his life over the counter of the Dufferin post-office, it might have proved a salutary tonic to his mind in the

way of stinging it into healthy reaction and into readjustment with the changed conditions of his daily experience. But of course he did not hear it. Nor till long afterwards did he hear the tale which sprang from it, which Stella Moon faithfully promulgated through the length of the municipality; namely, that when the rector was refused by Madame Darcy, he fell into a swoon, "an' laid two days without knowin' nothin', at Evelyn Dare's."

As he did not know of this story while it was flying through the air, he was equally ignorant of the fact that it transformed him at once into a hero of romance to the young women of his congregation. He was certainly surprised by a sudden influx of very fine pocket-handkerchiefs variously wrought by many fair hands, and by a new stock of book-marks of a consolatory character, in numbers sufficient to mark every saint's day in the year, covered with Scripture phrases tending to resignation, bossed on white card with black and gold beads, or in Berlin yarn of a sanguinary hue. He was certainly surprised and somewhat distressed at the numbers of these gifts, but to their special personal significance he remained deaf and blind to the end, to the inward chagrin of more than one damsel who in secret sighed to console him

CHAPTER XXXII.

RETURN.

THE twilight still tinged the western blue, and Venus' primrose lamp flamed low above the Sound, as Agnes with Vida by her side once more walked along the path by the water which with her face turned hitherward she traversed so many years before. The toddling child of that hour of flight was a tall girl now, as tall as her mother, and walked beside her with a lightness and fleetness remarkable in a daughter of civilization.

"I cannot walk fast, not here," said Agnes slowly. "You will see these waves, these trees, these flowers, before you every day, my darling, but your mother can look upon them only now."

"Forgive me, mamma. I did not know that I was walking too fast; but I feel so excited. Oh, mamma, I feel dreadfully. I cannot, cannot stay here without you! I cannot live without you, my own, own mamma, you know that I cannot. Let us go back! *Do* let us go back, both, both!" and Vida, midway in the path that led to Lotusmere, turned and blocked the way so that her mother could not go on.

"Don't test me beyond my strength, dear child; I cannot bear it," Agnes answered with broken voice

"I have yet to learn how to live without you. But your father, Vida, is almost helpless, and there is nobody who loves him to care for him now."

"I do not love him!" exclaimed the girl passionately. "I will not love him. He was not kind to you, or you would never have left him. You could not love him, mamma, or you would not have gone away."

"I left him because I loved him, Vida, and I come back to him and bring you to him because I love him, and because you are your father's as well as your mother's child."

"I don't want to be my father's child. I don't want any father!" exclaimed Vida, in a climax of grief caused by the utter realization, now, that she was about to part with her mother, that for the first time in her life she was to be without her. "I — I could bear it, his being my father, if you would go in with me; go in and stay with me, mamma. Why don't you? He needs you more than he does me!"

"He does. Child, do not break my heart. I cannot go in. If I could, do you think I should let you go to him without me?"

"If you could! Oh, mamma, you never did anything naughty, I know you *never* did; yet you say if you *could*. What is the matter? Why is everything wrong?"

Agnes hesitated to reply. She could not bear to withhold any portion of the truth from her child. She feared that if she told her that there lived another woman recognized by the world as her father's wife, the loving and passionate girl would refuse utterly to go to him, while her mother turned her back on his home, and went forth alone like an outcast.

"Vida, you know that your father was divorced from your mother, but you do not know that he married again."

"Married again! And you alive! Where is she? Let her stay with him! I will not! I will stay with my own mother."

"Vida, we are almost at your brother's grave. Let us go on. *You* remember little Cyril, darling?" and taking the now unresisting hand in hers, Agnes led Vida to the grave, almost hidden by the overgrown shrubbery; yet fresh beside the marble lamb lay Mary Ben's unwithered flowers.

Vida bent low and kissed them. "I remember it like a dream, mamma," she said, "that night when you held my hand, and I kissed this very spot and said, 'Good night, little brother,' and then you led me away. I can see my red legs going down the garden path. They pleased me so, those red stockings, and yet I cried because my little brother was in the grave and could not wear any. A big man carried me on to a big vessel. It seems as if I dreamed it."

"You did not dream it. It happened just as you remember it," said Agnes, pushing back the long grass, and bent over the grave in silence. When she turned she drew Vida into her arms.

"My own, only darling, you love your mother?" she asked.

"Oh, mamma! better than all the world beside, but next to you I love — Mr. Dane."

"You will owe him affection and gratitude as long as you live, for all he has done for you; but I don't want you to think of him now" —

"How can I help it, mamma! He went to the Pinnacle yesterday, expecting me to render that long page in Sallust. How did he feel to find the house empty and us gone? Oh, I want to go back! I am—wretched; that's what I *am*!" and the thought of the Dufferin rector brought a storm of tears which the sight of her far-off little brother's grave, and her dimly remembered father's house, had no power to evoke.

Agnes waited till her child had sobbed herself silent.

"Vida, *do* you love your mother?" in a tone of absolute anguish.

"Yes, mamma, you know I do," said the young voice, now subdued to meekness.

"Do you love her enough to do what she asks you to do without outcry, because it gives her pain?"

"I—hope so, mamma."

"Do you love her well enough to try to believe that it is harder for her to turn her back on her only child, than it is for that child to go from her?"

"Yes, mamma, I do."

"Do you love your mother so much, that for her sake you will try and do everything for your father that she would do if she could stay with him and care for him herself?"

"I—will try, mamma."

"Do you love your own mother so well, that because she loves him you will love him, your own father, till he makes you love him for his own sake?"

"For your sake, mamma, for your sake, I will—I will try to love him."

"Then come with me" She snatched her to her breast and held her tight. She kissed her forehead, her

eyes, her mouth. She strained her to her heart in one long, agonized embrace, then, speechless, led her up the lawn path toward the house. The lower shutters were not closed. A light shone faintly out on the back piazza. It burned in Cyril's old study. Softly Agnes, leading Vida, stole up to the window.

"Look!" she whispered, "look! There — is your father."

The back of his chair was toward the window. His face in profile was distinctly visible from without. He was lying far back in an extension chair, his entire form supported. Against the table beside him leaned a crutch and cane. On it stood a shaded lamp, papers, and books. One arm was outstretched listlessly toward them, but he was gazing into the grate. He had received a letter from Circe that morning, saying that on Saturday she should sail for Havre in the French transatlantic steamer, *L'Impératrice*. He was wondering why this announcement did not move him more; why she already seemed extraneous to his existence, forming no intrinsic part of it. Because she did not, he was here to-night in his old home, his first, his only home. He had never forgiven her insulting allusion to his parentage. Her taunt that she supplied him with all the luxuries of his existence roused his latent manhood to the rescue of his self-respect. In health he was certainly in no wise dependent upon her for anything save the unusual splendor of her abode and equipage, which she chose, and which it pleased him that she should support. His own income from public and private sources was ample for any modest style of living. Nor with all his lavish

astes had he been a spendthrift. When cut off by broken health from public place and the practice of his profession, he still owned Lotusmere, and possessed a moderate income from investments.

That night as he sat alone with the journal telling of Linda's death in his hand, he said, "Better poverty," for, compared with the splendor which surrounded him, anything that he could command by his own means was poverty, "better poverty than all this from a woman's bounty, when she has ceased to care for me. I shall go back to Lotusmere. If she does not choose to go with me, she can stay away."

"I shall go back to Europe. If he does not choose to go with me, so much the better. It is a living death to be obliged to drag about a half-dead man, *triste, tétu*, as he is now. I'll do it no longer. The world is wide. This young, handsome man brings Europe back again; its slow, delicious, intoxicating air, its courts, its conquests. Why have I stayed in this barbarous country so long? Because I was idiot enough to allow myself to be infatuated by one miserable man. The spell is broken. I am going." So said Circe's fluent brain, while she tapped her pretty foot on the Turkish rug at the French minister's, and smiled upon the young Austrian baron above her emerald-studded fan.

Both had carried out their resolve. Mrs. Sutherland King was ready to sail, and Mr. Cyril King, on account of ill health, had come back to the quiet retirement of Lotusmere. He seemed to be living in a dream. All his later life looked faded out. While living it he had avoided entering this house, and especially this

room. It seemed to comfort him now, even while it made his loneliness more utter. It was Agnes who stood on the threshold, his girl-wife ; he saw her again as he used to see her, in those first bright, happy days. Oh, how was it that he was ever harsh and selfish and stern with her when she loved him so much that his lightest look was her law ! It was because he was so selfish, that he had no comprehension how much such love was worth. He knew now to the deepest depth of his lonely heart, that it was worth more than all the world beside. He thought of his lost boy, his only son, into whose little life crept so faintly a father's tenderness. In this very room he looked upon him last, and as the face, seraphic in death, came back to him, he groaned aloud.

And he had a little daughter : Vida, the image of himself. *Had* a daughter ! she was not dead. She must be living still, somewhere in the world. How old ? More than twelve years. If he could but see her ! He had no right ; he knew that. Yet it was not through utter indifference that he had sought no sign of her all these years. How could he, when she was with her mother ? How could he confront that mother ? How could he look into the eyes of Agnes, his wife ? He never could. He longed to see her ; but if she were to stand before him now, he would hide his face from her truth-searching gaze. But if Vida would appear, if he could see her golden head come in that door where her young mother used to stand, she would be to him as an angel come down from heaven.

The mother and daughter stood trembling without, each face close to the window-pane. With every breath

Agnes strained Vida tighter to her heart, as if she could never let her go.

Cyril groaned again, and turned his head restlessly toward the door.

"Now!" said Agnes, drawing Vida swiftly away. "*Your father!* dear child, remember that! Love him — for your mother's sake," and with an almost superhuman effort, she put from her own breast the clinging girl, opened the outer door, and, in tones that were a low wail, said: "Go, go to him! If you love me, do not come back." She gently thrust Vida in, closed the door, and shut her inside. Then, with a faint cry, wrung from love and anguish, the mother turned and sped alone out into the night.

The moment that Vida found herself in the dim hall alone, separated from her mother by the door which that mother's hand had shut, with that mother's last injunction still ringing in ears and heart, her own wild impulses for the instant seemed to be allayed, and she had but one thought: that was to do her mother's bidding. "I hate him; I do!" she said with suppressed fury, drawing up her tall, slight figure till it seemed the incarnation of childish majesty. "I hate him, for he was not good to you, mamma, but I'll do as you tell me — if it kills me," and Vida pushed on to the door that she knew opened into the library.

A faint knock, so faint, indeed, that the solitary inmate of the room thought it must be a fancied sound, though he again turned his head uneasily toward the door. Another knock, faint, quick, yet tinglingly defined. Sickness, weakness, and remorse had filled Cyril King with superstitious feeling. The knock was so

unusual, yet so certain, that his heart beat quicker, and the last tinge of color faded from his face. He felt as if he had lost the power of articulation. Another knock, more wiry and quicker than the other.

"Come in," said a hollow voice.

The door opened slowly. On the threshold, gazing intently in, stood a young girl dressed in white. Her face, as white as her dress, was set within shining masses of yellow hair, and lit with a pair of large eyes, which, in their preternatural excitement, seemed to flash and flame like stars.

"Great God!" It was the only exclamation of the occupant of the chair. That the image in the doorway could be of actual flesh, it did not occur to him to think, for he recognized at once the face of his child. After all she had died. His prayer was granted, and she was now sent to him to show him the exceeding loveliness of the daughter that he had ignored and lost.

The figure neither advanced nor retreated. It was impossible for Cyril to go to it. Vida was held motionless and speechless by a conflict of emotion more overpowering than his own. Her purpose was to obey her mother, yet she seemed to have no power to do it.

The longer she gazed upon the man in the chair, the more her soul rose up against him.

"I — hate — you," she said, slowly advancing a few steps over the threshold. "Why were you wicked to my mother! Why must I come back to you — when you don't love me, or love my mamma? It's because she — loves you. Why *will* you love him, mamma? If you will, I cannot do as you tell me. I try, and I cannot — oh, I cannot!" and with one long, piercing cry, Vida sank down midway in the room.

That cry, so human, so girlish, so hysterical, was an inexpressible relief to Cyril King. His transcendent and terrible little visitor at least was not a ghost. Vida's pure, strong health would not allow her to faint away. She simply sank down under her own overpowering excitement. She very soon arose again.

"My darling," said her father, in the gentlest voice, "will you go to the little stand over there, and fill a glass with wine and drink it? It will do you good."

"Thank you, but I never drank any wine; perhaps my mamma would not like to have me; so I would rather not."

"Very well, then you needn't. Will you bring that little low chair here, and sit down and talk with me?"

Vida did as she was asked. She sat down before her father, but not near to him.

"Will you tell me your name?" asked Cyril King, gazing upon her face with inexpressible sadness.

"Vida King, mamma says. I thought my name was Vida Darcy."

"Where is your mamma?"

"Out there! Out there in the dark!" and she rose to her feet again with the rising torrent of emotion. She strained her eyes to see if her dear mother was looking in upon her that moment through the window, but saw nothing.

"Out there!" exclaimed Cyril King with transfigured countenance, as he vainly tried to turn his head far enough to see the window. "Out there! Go and entreat her to come in!"

"She would not come. She told me if I loved her I would not come back. That is why— Are you my father?"

"I am."

"Then why don't you love my mother?"

"God knows I *do* love her, Vida."

"If you loved her, how could you be so wicked to her as — as to marry somebody else and she alive?"

"Because I was a wicked man, Vida. But if I was never punished before, I am punished now, when my only child tells me that she hates me."

"I don't want to hate you," said Vida with a softening voice, "but I can't help it when she tells me to love you for her sake. You must have been very bad to her, or she would come in. Why don't she come in? How can I live without my mother! and she says I must stay with you and comfort you."

"She does? And you don't want to? I don't blame you, my child."

"I would want to — I mean I would be willing to," said Vida with a longing thought of the far-off Pinnacle, "if my mamma could stay too. Why did she ever go away from here? I remember this room," looking around, "I remember when mamma led me by the hand down the lawn in my red stockings. What was it for? You hadn't married anybody then, had you?" with rising wrath.

One thing was perfectly apparent to Cyril. Agnes had never told of his shortcomings to their child. The very tumult of passionate grief amid which she now spoke and acted was partly caused by the conflict in her mind of facts dimly guessed at, or still more dimly remembered. Her affections and her perceptions were all at war. She looked like a wild dove beaten about in a hopeless storm.

"My darling, would you mind coming and sitting a little nearer to your father?" he asked tenderly.

She looked at him searchingly, but did not move.

"Your father cannot come nearer to you, or he would."

This time her glance fell upon the helpless arm, the supported form, and she moved her chair perceptibly, yet a very little way, forward.

"I want to see you, Vida. I want to see how much you look like your dear mother."

She held the little chair in her hand now, and drew it on where the light of the shaded lamp fell full upon her face. He was dumb before the vision it revealed to him. There, refined into early girlhood, were the perfect outlines of his own once magnificent form: there the curling masses of amber hair, the fine, imperious features—all his. But the great, soft, questioning eyes, lit with fitful flames that seemed to go out in dew, eyes that looked forth like two exiles, from the splendid beauty in which they were set—these were the eyes of a girl that looked up to his in love, once, ages ago, by a gate in old Ulm.

"You have your mother's eyes, Vida," he said at last, and his own were dim.

The chair, unconsciously it seemed, came a little nearer.

"I have been a bad, selfish man, Vida. I never deserved the love of your dear mother. My love was like myself. I took everything, and gave what was convenient. I loved your mother truly, at first, but I loved myself and my own gratification better than all the world beside. I never *meant* to be false to your

mother, but I was, and she left me ; left me that night she led you down the lawn. Two years later I was divorced, and married another. That woman by law is now my wife ; that is why your dear mother says she cannot come to comfort me. I have never forgotten you, Vida. I have always loved my child. How could I come to you, or send for you, when I had treated your mother so badly ? Will you believe me, when I tell you that every year since she left me, I have longed more and more for a sight of her dear face, for the sound of her voice, telling me that she forgave me ? I never loved her as I love her now — when it is too late. Can you forgive me, Vida, the wrong I have done you ? Can you hate me when I tell you that I repent, in sackcloth and ashes, of my many sins. Can you hate me a little less ? ”

“ I — I don’t hate you now. I am sorry for you. ”

“ I want you to be sorry for me, Vida. I am all alone now, as much as your mother, and I cannot walk about as she can. ”

“ Can’t you walk at all ? ” in tones of pity. “ I am *so* sorry for you ; I ” — rising and standing close to him — “ I love you — almost. I could quite, if mamma could come. I don’t see any other woman, ” gazing about as if the feminine foe to her happiness might be suspended on the wall. “ I don’t understand about two wives at once. I hate her now, that other wife. I shall always believe that my mamma is your wife, and nobody else. ”

“ I’ve always been troubled with that belief myself, Vida ; if I had not, I should have got more enjoyment than I did out of the flesh pots of Egypt. ”

“ I never heard of such pots. My mamma **never** told me about them, or Mr. Dane either. ”

"Who is Mr. Dane?"

"He is the Dufferin rector, and my teacher."

"Oh ho! Is he young?"

"Yes. Mamma says he is. He used to be so **lone-**
some-looking; but he isn't now."

"What has revived his spirits?"

"Evelyn says it's his rides to the Pinnacle **every**
week, that have done him so much good."

"So he came to the Pinnacle every week?"

"Yes, every Monday, to hear my lessons. I **can**
read in Sallust, and I'm in algebra."

"Do you care for him?"

"Very much."

"How much?"

"More than for any one, except mamma," **with a**
deep sigh.

"Does your mamma care as much for him as you
do?"

"I think not. It don't seem as if she did. But she
likes him. I know she does."

"She does! why do you think so?"

"Why, how could she help liking him! He has
taught me for two years — everything I ought to know.
And he brings mamma books. And they talk, when
my lessons are over."

"Oh! they talk, do they? What do they talk
about?"

"The first time he came to the Pinnacle, they talked
about religion."

"And never mentioned the subject since?"

"Not as they did then. Mr Dane looked very **se-**

were at mamma, because she did not go twenty miles to church, but she didn't mind."

"Then your Mr. Dane is a sort of gospel martinet?"

"I don't know what that is."

"It's a religious tyrant. So he wishes to force your mother to go to his confounded church, and dares to look severely at her?"

"Oh, no, he don't!" with an air of injury worthy of her sire. "He's never looked severely at her since that first time. He looks — ah, I think he looks as if he liked her ever so much. His face grows so gentle when he speaks to her. He is very nice," with another deep-drawn sigh.

Cyril King groaned.

"His church is not confounded," said Vida, recalling the opprobrious epithet. "It's a beautiful stone church with a tower, a Gothic church with stained glass windows, and a great organ. I never knew anything so pleasant as to go and hear the chants, and — and to see Mr. Dane in a gown, and to hear him preach. I understood every word he said. It was all about how we should govern our own spirits. I thought he meant me. I've such a temper, and I can't govern it."

"You will never govern it any better for listening to that man. No wonder, Vida, you have no love left for your father. That fellow has taken it all."

"I don't like you to call him a 'fellow,'" said Vida drawing back. "It don't sound nice. He is a gentleman; mamma says so. How can I help caring for him when he has been so good to me?"

"And your father has not. Go on, child."

"And so good, so very good, to mamma. I care most for him because of that."

"And your father has not. It is too true, Vida. I reap as I sowed."

"He says that there is not another woman in the world to compare with my mamma."

"He did!"

"Yes, he told me so, and that I must try to be like her. I never can. Why, do you know," — in tones of awe, — "my mamma writes books out of her own head!"

"Books! What kind of books?"

"Nice books, very nice books. She wrote one for boys, about a boy. She put in many things that happened to my little brother; she said she did."

A heavy shadow passed over Cyril King's face.

"Books! How did she ever happen to write books? And when they were written, what could she do with them up there in the woods?"

"She could send them to her publisher, and get money for them," said the princess Vida superbly.

"So your mother has a publisher!"

"She has three or four. She has had them this long time. Why shouldn't she have publishers, if she can write books?"

"It's not every one who writes books who can get a publisher. It strikes me as the oddest thing I ever heard of, that *your mother* has written a book, to say nothing of publishers."

"Book! She has written more than one or two. The second one she wrote is 'The Annals of a Quiet City.' Mr. Dane thinks everything of it, though he

don't know that mamma wrote it, or that she ever wrote any book. But he never speaks as you do, as if she couldn't write one," said Vida, in tones of deep resentment.

"It's not that I think she couldn't, but that I think of her in such a different way. I knew she could paint. I wonder how she came to write?"

"Because it was in her to do it, I think," and the young haughty head went proudly up. "She sent away what she wrote, because she must have money to pay for her food and mine, and for our clothes, and for Evelyn's rooms, and for books, and for everything we had. Who would do it if my mamma didn't work?"

"I would gladly have sent your mother money, Vida, all you and she would have needed, but I did not know where she was. And if I had, I should have known also that she would not wish to take it from me."

"No. How could she when" — and Vida again looked anxiously about the room.

"You will see no one here to trouble you, Vida," said Cyril gloomily. "The person you naturally dread and dislike will not come back perhaps for a year. Till she does, will you be my little comforter?" sadly. "You say your dear mother brought you here for that, and I think she would not have brought you if she had not by some means known that I was alone."

"Perhaps Mary Ben told her when she wrote."

"Does Mary Ben write your mother?"

"Yes. Every month. She has ever since I can remember. She has gone to stay at Mary Ben's to-night. Oh, mamma! my own mamma!" and Vida again gazed toward the darkened window.

So it was in the sailor's house, the little house down at the Front, that Agnes — once his Agnes — would sleep, if she could sleep, that night. And her own pretty room overhead empty, and he here, and their child ! A sudden cry came up from his heart for her. He could be nothing more to her. He knew that, but if he could see her sitting there where Vida sat, if he could only see her long enough to ask her forgiveness before they parted forever, that would be much, how much to him now.

Vida withdrew her long gaze from the window to see two large tears in her father's eyes. She had never seen tears in a man's eyes before. "Oh, don't, please don't cry!" and the same instant her soft hand was wiping the tears away. Did mighty nature assert herself in the touch, and through it thrill the mysterious bond of blood, the same in each heart?

"If I don't love you quite, I will try. I do love you, if you love mamma. I only hated you because I thought you didn't love her. If you are sure you do, then I love you, and you are my very own papa," and the girl's arms were about her father's neck now. The faded gold and the gold undimmed touched in their mingling locks, and the breast of manhood shook with deeper throes than could possibly wring the girlish heart.

The storm of emotion had sobbed itself out, when, uplifting his head suddenly, Cyril said: "You won't care so very much for that — that — curate, will you?"

"Oh, I must, papa. I shall care for him always."

"Dreadful!" groaned Cyril; "I know he is a prig."

"If you will call Mr. Dane names I can't love you

if I do try, and I want to love you, papa. Mr. Dane is — is — beautiful!”

“Oh, dear! But you are sure that your mother don’t think so? Sure she don’t think him a god?”

“I don’t know. She don’t act as if she did.”

“You are sure you only care for him a little? You don’t love him?”

“I don’t know how much ‘care’ it takes to make love. I—I feel as if I worshipped him. I didn’t know it when I was at the Pinnacle. I never said so before.”

“No, you don’t worship him, either. You only think so because he’s a long way off. I believe he has been trying to get an undue influence over your mind. I detest the fellow.”

“Then I can’t love you, papa.”

“Then I don’t detest him. But never mention his name to me again.”

“You called him a ‘fellow’ over again. I—I think it’s too bad,” with a bitter sob.

“There, there! Don’t cry, and I’ll never call him so any more. You’re a tyrant, Vida. You are ruling your sick parent with a rod of gold. And your mother writes books! What a pair you must be! ‘The Annals of a Quiet City.’ To think my Aggie wrote it! I read it long ago, Vida. The name attracted me, Ulm Neil.’ I knew some Ulmite wrote it, ’twas so full of Ulm; and to think it was your mother! *Did she, Vida?*”

“Yes. In Evelyn Dare’s little back bedroom.”

How was it with the wife and mother, out alone in

the darkness? As she rushed down that lawn path her feet faltered when she reached the grave of her child, and she sank down upon it. She had known no grief so bitter as this which now wrung her heart, since she sat there on the night of her first flight. Even then her child went with her to cheer her desolation. Now, after having lived so long, loved and renounced so much, she was going forth to unknown lands alone. She made the sacrifice of her own free-will, the final seal of her life-long love. And having made it, her own being arose in bitter revolt against the loneliness of her lot. Why must she live on to the end, bereft of all that women hold most dear? Surely she had wrought no wrong to any living creature, had committed no known sin, which should doom her to desolation all her days. Home, husband, children, love, friendship even — why was she robbed of them all? She shrank back from it, she could not bear it, the life of thought and of unceasing toil unlightened by the love that should be its inspiration, which she saw lengthening out before her, and that only, down to the very gate of the grave.

“My child, my child!” and it was for the child on earth, not the child in heaven, that she cried. Above her was the night sky of June, and its questioning stars. Before her the great Sound rolled in, lapping with hungry, human cry the stolid sands on its shore. Was there not a tone insatiate in every voice of nature? The very universe seemed to voice her cry of immortal want. Behind her was her home, her only home. In it sat her husband, yes, *her* husband, *her* child, while she sat here, nothing hers but **a grave**. Nothing, nothing! Her face lay prone upon it.

"I am tired," she said, "I feel as if I could not go another step, as if I could not think another thought, as if I could not endure another pang. If all might end here and now, I would thank God." But she drew herself up at last. She knew that she must go on. She turned to go down the narrow path to Mary Ben's, and the lighted windows drew her gaze backward.

Ah, if she could but see them once again before the ocean was set between them and her, — just once, just their faces together, to carry away with her. That picture would be so much better than nothing to her heart. She believed she could look upon it now. She would not go near, not very near; she would stand on the ground, outside the piazza, where it would not be possible for them to see her; and as she said this she was already retracing her steps over the lawn. Her feet clung to the turf that they might send forth no sound, and paused at last when she stood in direct line with the inmates of the library.

Cyril's face was distinctly visible and Vida, — yes, Vida was just rising from a low chair. The mother, with wildly beating heart, saw all that came after, the advancing, the retreating, the angry gestures, the dewy glances of her child. In spite of her own injunctions she knew that child too well to believe she would open her heart to her father, or reach his, without a struggle. But her affections would triumph at last; she knew that. Holding fast her own heart, she waited for that triumph out in the darkness alone. Then she could go her way saying, "It is well with him." She did

not falter even when the cry came through the window,
"Mamma! my own mamma!"

She saw the one outstretched arm, she saw the
young head bent down, she heard the sobs of man and
girl; then she would not sink to earth, she fled. .

CHAPTER XXXIII.

RETRIBUTION: REWARD.

Is there any sense of human helplessness so utter as that one feels in the black night of a storm at sea? The abyss above, the abyss beneath, the vast hollow between, torn by the fury of elemental conflict, and resounding with the rush and roar of its revolt. Agnes held fast to her berth while one instant the great ship seemed plunging downward into a gulf of waters, and the next vaulted up, shuddering, upon the pitch of a spasmodic wave; then it shook, it rolled to and fro, as if its mighty bars were about to part and go down forever; yet it went on. The wind shrieked through the cordage and tore everything in its path. Lights went out, voices called, bells rang, the great heart of the engine struggled with convulsive throb against the throes of ocean, as if it were a death-struggle to see which should stop and which beat on. The ocean and the sky seemed to collapse together.

If light could have fallen upon this sight it would have stripped it of all its mystery of terror. But in darkness and helplessness human hearts and voices were crying out to Heaven. Groans and prayers and shrieks of terror came up from the lower deck. The great saloon was full of sobs and murmured prayers,

While the crying of little children and the moaning of the sick added the final note of human appeal to the *miserere* of the tempest. Agnes clung to her couch in that silent daze of faith and prayer which in some organizations is the result of extreme danger descending upon extreme sorrow. It was awful. It was like the night of judgment. If she could stand long enough to help anybody, how gladly she would try. It was impossible. She could do nothing but lie there, be thumped about, and await the end. Of course the end was very nigh. The great ship must divide and go down. It was dreadful that those little children, those tender women, must be engulfed in the ravening sea; but she could not save them. She was going down with them, and of her human sorrow that would be the end.

"It is well," she said with a weary sigh. "I am tired. What could music, or art, or high thought be to me now?"

"We are so tired, my heart and I!"

"It is cold," she murmured with a shudder, as a mounting sea rushed in a whirlpool over the deck, "very cold; but I shall not be in it. That of me which feels warmth or cold, that thinks, loves, and suffers, will not be in the sea but at rest, — at rest in peace, through the merciful love of God, at rest in Him, somewhere in his universe. Father, forgive my sins, and keep my darlings as in the hollow of thy loving hand forever and forever."

On this prayer the morning dawned. The storm went down. The universe looked one waste of waves. The ocean was a heaving plain of gray. A firmament

of sullen gray came down to meet it. Out of both came a mighty moan. Now and then two waves would rise up from their uneasy bed with foaming mane, collide, fly on, topple, and fall with a roar of pain. Great shreds of ragged mist, torn from the long, low, level cloud that barred the watery waste, went scurrying by. The muffled thud of a gun throbbed through flying storm-mist that still clung to the sea. Presently through its opaque gray glimmered a signal light. Then another cannon boom shuddered out into space.

"A ship in distress!" was the low cry that flew from grateful lip to lip on board the strong Cunarder, that, outriding the storm unvanquished, bore every soul of her precious human freight into the gray morning dawn unharmed. "A ship in distress!"

Every officer and man of the crew, from the captain to the stoker, beaten and worn as they were with the long night watch and work, stood none the less alert to answer to the cry for human help. Every moment the shock of the gun became nearer, the gleam of the signal light clearer; at last came the hoarse shout: "Ship ahoy!" The cry of the human voice struck through every listening heart, thrilling and chilling it as no boom of cannon could.

This is what the straining eyes on the deck of the Cunarder saw in that gray dawn, in that sullen waste of wave and storm: A dismembered steamer, all odds against it, fighting with the sea, on the last edge of doom. Out of the beating mist, out of the mighty swell, she bore upon them, her cordage flying, her masts splintered, her bulwarks broken, she rolling and careening at the maniac will of the waves. Through the

rush of wind and water struck the steady pulses of the pumps and the clear, assuring human cry of "Brave my boys!"

At the first glimpse of the Cunarder a great shout of joy broke into the cry of despair which a moment before rose from the decks of *L'Impératrice*. It was the signal that made the awful struggle for life begin. With the shout: "Boats out!" and the counter cry from numberless distracted voices: "We are sinking!" a panic began whose extremity of human terror, selfishness, and despair, no words of any human language are in the least degree adequate to portray. In vain the boats of both ships were lowered. In vain the worn-out voice of the brave captain of *L'Impératrice* essayed to restrain the mortal tumult. Every man forsook wheel and pumps, and each one struck out for his own life. Men clung to belaying pins; men lashed themselves under the shelter of shivering bulwarks; men seized life-preservers and leaped into the sea; men bore down into the already overcrowded boats, trampling women and children beneath their feet. The shrieks and prayers of women, the wailing of infants, mingled with the shouts of command, the groans and oaths of men. In vain the commander of the Cunarder in trumpet shout declared that with men at the pumps and wheel, without selfishness or self-destruction, every one might be saved. It is as easy to quench flame with oil as to restrain with speech the frenzy of human panic confronting death.

Agnes gazed from the very edge of the deck, her heart panting, her senses strained to anguish of sight and of hearing, her faculties tortured with the neces-

sity of comprehending all, her soul agonizing to save, while her feeble hands hung helpless.

“When they reach us, when they are safe on board, I can do something, something, for them, those poor women and children. If I could but reach them there! If I could stay this holocaust!” And with these words a low, piercing cry seemed to be crushed out of her own heart. A woman that instant was thrust back upon deck by a crowd of trampling men, and the last boat, with its frenzied crew, pushed off. Agnes’ eyes had rested for moments upon the slender figure of this woman, as she had seen it driven on by the crushing crowd. Was there one hope left for her now? Would the toppling *L’Impératrice* stay above water long enough for the boats to unload and push back! She had on no life-preserver. There must be one near at hand. Agnes, leaning far over the deck’s railing, between her lifted hands tried to call to the woman to put one on, but her soft voice was caught up and borne back by the wind.

Nevertheless, standing apart from the crowd who now rushed to the other end of the ship to watch the advance of the struggling boats, something in her attitude and gestures caught the attention of the despairing woman left behind. She stretched forth her hands in mute entreaty, she turned her face in last appeal, — the face of *Circe Sutherland*. Her hands were outstretched for help. The hands of the woman opposite were outreached to save. In that instant, in that long last look of commingled pity and despair, each knew the other. In another a cry of terror broke from both. The deck of *L’Impératrice* heaved upward

She rolled, she threw her bows, she shuddered, then with one slow, awful plunge, sucking the last boat with all its living freight into her swirl, making a whirlpool that seemed to drag the stanch Cunarder after in her wake, she went down.

Agnes saw the woman opposite throw her white arms upward, her head heavenward, saw her fair, fair upturned face sink down, down into the gray waste, the sobbing waves close over it and shut it out of sight; and as she saw it she fell forward, lost to all mortal consciousness.

Perhaps ten days after the last event occurred, Vida, reading the morning journal to her father in the breakfast room at Lotusmere, gave with girlish voice and with no knowledge of its personal significance this announcement:—

NEW YORK, *June 26.*

The agent of the Transatlantic Steamship Company has received the following despatch from the manager of the line in Paris: *L'Impératrice* was disabled by hurricane and sunk June 15, one thousand miles from Havre. First officer and twenty passengers lost. Eighty passengers saved by an English ship. All speak in praise of the lamented Captain Rousseau, who was cool and brave, notwithstanding the fearful sea."

Agnes rested at Lucerne. Already the shores of the idyllic Vierwald-städter See had taken on for her the tender aspect of familiar reminiscence. She sought it as a chosen refuge. The shocks through which she had passed left her in no condition to meet the demands of ordinary travel. She was haunted by a face: a face

that had so stamped itself upon her soul that it could never fade out. Till her latest breath she was to see it in all the startling distinctness with which it now gazed in upon the very eyes of her soul in the agony of utter, final appeal. Agnes was destined never to be left to hate even those who had wronged her most. She was created for love, suffering, help, and forgiveness. To her Linda's death wiped out Linda's life. She shrank from Circe Sutherland. Her soul abhorred her, her heart hated her in moments while she lived. That dying gaze annulled the capability of resentment in the emotions of Agnes. "Where is her soul?" she said, and her own seemed to follow out after it, and to brood over it with sorrowful prayer and ineffable pity.

She had just passed a crisis in her life. She knew it. She was sure of it. She seemed to have no strength nor knowledge nor desire to begin life anew. If there was more work for her to do, the strength to do it, the wisdom to know it, the desire for it, would be granted her. She must wait. She must hold all her being receptive to the undreamed-of good, if so be, unknown and unaware, it awaited her. In this spirit she wandered through the Forest Cantons which border the fairest of all Swiss lakes. She met pleasant people. She made dear friends. But when she turned from their smiles and kindly accents, she knew that with them all she was no less alone. Her heart cried dumbly for her child, yearned over the hapless image of the man who was once her husband, went back in tender gratitude to her friend. The three lived, yet was she alone. If they were but dead to her, then she could bury them and go on. She could put the garments that clothed

them in her thought aside, hide them out of sight, and begin to live anew. Because they were not dead, but living, she could not put them from her. Every fibre of her being seemed to cling to them, and as she tried to turn and go on without them, she found that it could not be, she carried them with her still and ever. They were with her, yet they were not hers. They filled all her thoughts, and yet she was alone. She could not go back. She could not go on. She could but wait and look and listen.

Even these she was unwilling to do at first. In her utter desolation when she turned from her child, it seemed to her that even nature could be nothing to her more. What would be all its elemental beauty, void of the human affection and companionship which is its soul? Then she was lashed by ocean. Its terrific energy, its glut of human sacrifice before her very eyes, still made memory shudder. That face, that fair, fair face! should she not forever see it sinking, sinking into the engulfing waves? Slowly through all this pain, yet day by day, she seemed to feel on her wounds a touch of healing.

The mother Nature distils the needed elixir for each hurt child. Through her quiet waters peace stole to Agnes. Through the uplifting of her mountains Agnes grew silently once more toward strength. Not even the conscious heart could shut out from the exquisitely attuned sense the myriad rivulets of delicately melodious sound that rippled inward from ear to soul. Not even this selfishly asserting pain could close her eyes upon the marvels and mysteries of unimagined hues creeping tenderly up to her across the shifting

grass, throbbing before her sight in blinding clouds of emblazoned mist, or tingeing inaccessible snow-peaks with the dawning blush of unfolding rose.

The mighty mother! Everywhere was she not one? The massed cloud moving northward from the Bernese Alps, it was the very same that she had seen before panoply the lowlier mountains beside the blue lake of another hemisphere. The vagrant vapors roving in and out amid the bewildering rocks, how often far away she had seen them cleft and carried upward before the wind to the highest country of cloud. The opalescent veil of film trembling above the Righi Kulm, did it not shimmer before the green Pinnacle across the seas? The stony rampart of that Western mountain, was it not the same stuff as this which had defied ages of storm in the scarred head of domed Pilatus? Here and there might be change in heights and outline, in more awful effects, in a new atmosphere, yet through all there was no hint of strangeness. The one mother ministered to her child here as there.

It was as if the same lichens purpled the rocks, the same insects hummed in the air, the same crickets chirped in the moss, the same grasshoppers vaulted through the pennoned grass, the same flaming butterflies flickered past. The racing streams scampering to the vales below were but the far-off trout brooks that she loved. The hills held in their hollows tiny, tremulous lakes of liquid blue, tender as the lakelets of her far-off North. The translucent waters of Lucerne and Zug were not more profoundly azure, more intensely emerald, than the gleaming reservoir of the Canadian Tarn. Even the tinkling bells on the necks of

the Alpine kine and goats made her shut her eyes till she saw again the grazing cattle, the grassy pasture, the glinting spring before Evelyn's log-house. In nature all was kinship, companionship. Even the associations of this historic spot were all of personal heroism, of the grand democracy of a valorous race. Benumbed as she was, it was not possible for even her to sail up and down this lake hallowed by the legends of liberty, to visit the Mecca of Switzerland, to stand at the shrine of its hero, and not feel the old passion for human freedom, for human growth, quicken again above the ashes of her heart, and her silenced faculties through the dull sense of pain awake to somewhat of their primal power.

Thus without conscious volition she began and finished tasks that never seemed to be tasks. Imperceptibly she sought the ministry of labor. And one superlative evening she heard herself exclaim: "Thank God for work! It gives me to others, and makes me forget the weakness that is myself." Even these words she said with a hand upon her heart. She had received no letter from Vida written since the wreck of *L'Impératrice* was known in America. She, in her letters to her daughter, had made no reference to it. They did not know at Lotusmere the name of the ship in which she sailed. She had written to Vida just as she would have done had her eyes never beheld that awful catastrophe. She sent words only of love and cheer and help to her child. She sent no personal message to that child's father; but every line that she wrote tended to make her child more thoughtful, helpful, and loving toward him. Two letters from Vida, full of passionate love and longing for her

mother, full of tender, pitiful regrets for her father, had reached Lucerne. But they were written before she could have received Agnes' letter announcing her own arrival there. Since then no word had cheered the dreadful silence. As it lengthened by days and weeks it seemed to Agnes that nothing but the new power to work, and the necessity of doing it, kept her alive. It was not Cyril! A life, an awful death, separated him from her forever. She expected no word from him. But their child, — Vida, her bright, bright Vida, her ever-loving Vida, — why did not she speak to her exiled mother?

With this cry in her heart she sat at her window in the Pension Wallis. Her eyes followed the winding waters of the Reuss, past the Capellbrücke, past the Reussbrücke, past the Mühlenbrücke, past the blue Lucerne, till they rested on the truncated peaks of the Righi sheathed in glowing red; while above, thin clouds, rose-flushed, streamed upward like the smoke of incense from a mighty altar of worship set alone in the universe. It was natural as her breath, this far, high outlook. It seemed to translate and uplift her far above the human sorrow tugging at her heart. At such height, where no discord of earth could reach, there must be peace. The sense of far-off-ness, of uplifting, of divine repose, which it gave, was evanescent; but brief, visionary as it might be, how it broke for the moment the tense strain of suffering and endurance! There was a coming back, always a coming back, but somewhat of the pure strength of heaven's own lights seemed to come back also, to make easier to the tired heart the taking up of the

burden that for a moment's renewing it dared to cast down.

A faint, quick tap on the door of her room brought Agnes back from the ampler ether above the Righi. "Come in," she said gently, thinking it *Fifine*, the maid.

The door opened tremulously, and thinking a new *pensionnaire* had mistaken the room, she rose to rectify the mistake.

A head gleaming with golden hair, a young face radiant, yet almost painfully excited, appeared.

"Vida! Oh, my child!" and mother and daughter, each with a cry, rushed together.

One stood behind — a man smitten with premature age, leaning on crutch and cane. His curling yellow hair was streaked with gray, his face was lined with suffering, not with years. When this man and woman last stood face to face, neither had outpassed the glory of youth. Then the man was dazzling as a god in the untouched splendor of his manhood. Then the woman was worn and weary with her womanhood. Now it was the woman who was beautiful. Time had ripened, not withered her, and the serene light of her soul irradiated her soft eyes and suffused her delicate features, kindling them to a supernal loveliness.

Was this Agnes? It seemed to Cyril King as if his breath was going.

"Mamma!" The intonation made Agnes look up.

Was this Cyril?

The mother and child could cry with joy at the sight of each other. The husband and wife, trans-

fixed, gazed in silence. There was no speech, no language, no cry, at once possible to either soul. Each felt that it would be easy to sink down and die at the other's feet. This meeting, this look, this long, long look of reunion, of love, was it not joy? Was it not enough, at last, at last?

"Mamma!" Vida took her mother's hand; "mamma, papa loves *you*. After all he loves you, my own mamma, and I have told him over and over, though he cannot believe it, that you love him, that you have always loved him, and him only, through everything. Tell him it is true; that you do, mamma," and Vida laid her mother's hand upon her father's — that hand that shook so on his heavy staff.

"Forgive!" said his quivering lips.

"Forgive me," she answered.

"I love you, I believe I never ceased to love you," said the voice that once, so long ago, transfigured all the earth for her with these same words.

"I love you. I have always loved *you*!"

"I know it, and I know that I do not deserve it."

"I know only that I cannot choose but love you. Oh, come in! Come in and rest! Vida, ring the bell, my darling. You must have food. You must lie down. How did you come — across that dreadful ocean?" with a shudder. "But you have come! Both of you, my — oh, *have* you come? or is it a dream, another dream? I have dreamed it so often, when to wake was awful because you had *not* come. Vida! is it, *is* it you?"

"I will pinch you, mamma. Then you will be sure."

And Vida pinched her mother, then laughed over her, then cried over her, then called out, "Oh, I feel a ball in my throat bigger than one of Evelyn's hazel-nuts, yet I'm not angry, not in the least. I'm just beside myself, I'm so happy."

One autumn evening, in a salon of the Pension Wallis, there was a marriage ceremony performed, which beside the clergyman had but one witness. The witness was Vida King. The two who **were** wedded were Cyril King and Agnes Darcy.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONSUMMATION.

ATHEL DANE rode slowly through the Tarnstone woods to greet again the friend whom he had not seen for six long years. As he looked back upon them, very long these years seemed to him, so long indeed that he felt as if more of his life were compressed within their compass than in all the years that he lived before them. Measured by what really makes life, — emotion, experience, growth, — they made, indeed, the longest and fairest sum of his being, and held for him, so far as he had found it at all, the very treasure-trove of human life. He shrank even now from the memory of those first desolate days when he went back to life, — to its exacting duties, to its negative employments, its scrutinizing eyes, and uncharitable tongues, — to live, to bear life, to make the best and the most of it, under a sense of bereavement that filled not only his affections and emotions, but pervaded no less his faculties.

He did not analyze the quality of this sense of loss. Whether his soul was widowed or orphaned he did not know. But this he knew, that the kindred mind which had touched all his life with inspiration seemed now to be suddenly wrenched from it. A pure, pervasive light, that brightened all his way, had been utterly withdrawn, and he groped in the dark.

He thought that he did. Only by time was he able to discern that the lights withdrawn still shone for him. By many slow, silent, lonely steps he came to learn at last that it is by seeming loss only that we gain fruition here or hereafter. Imperceptibly his senses loosened their hold on the beloved presence ; it faded more and more into the mist of the past, but the soul held fast to its possession. His friend was always his friend, not to have or to hold, but to pray for and to remember. If her gentle eyes did not light his days, they shone still upon the earth. If he could not see her face, she yet lived in the world, and wherever she was, she remembered him and cared for him. Her presence had faded from before his sight, and still not less but more she was a force in his life, a quickening inspiration to him in thought and in deed.

Year by year he grew in scholarship, in eloquence, in puissant, helpful, consecrated humanity. He was the rector of Dufferin still, because he chose to be ; but in his yearly vacations he had not shunned the larger and louder world lying beyond its plains and mountains. He had studied human life in the lowest purlieus of the cities, and in their most cultivated coteries. He had mingled with men of all classes. He had associated with women of many gifts and graces, with women gentle, wise, and good. He had many delightful acquaintances and not a few friends. Yet some way they all seemed to abide on the outskirts of what was intrinsically himself. When he returned to solitude and sat down in silence with his soul, he found after all that the most sufficing companionship that he knew was still with one far distant, whose face he

might never see again. His intercourse with many types of mortals had convinced him of nothing more certainly than this, that perfect communion of mind and entire sympathy of spirit with spirit, even between two very dear to each other, is as rare in human experience as the flower of the aloe is in nature. He had come to believe that no life could call itself poor, in which had bloomed one perfect friendship. This consummate flower of human relationship blossomed once for him, and he held it still in his heart of hearts unfaded.

If nature gave hint of any growth deeper, closer, and sweeter, he knew that it was not his, he had never found it. He believed that he had held his whole being receptive to the fullest good that might come to him. He had even gone forth into the world to see if it waited for him there. He was willing that a new, living experience should prove dearer to him than his dearest memory. And the conclusion of the whole matter was that after years of waiting, if not of seeking, he was sure that sympathy so sufficing as that which this memory held he had never found a second time; that hours so full and pure in perfect companionship as those he once spent in the log-house by the Pinnacle had never been repeated. What life gave of peace and of heart content to other men he knew not. But he knew that one woman's friendship was the best that it had given to him.

The time came when Agnes wrote to him. It was when she was reunited to the husband of her youth. She scarcely touched upon the causes of their separation, but she dwelt fully upon the joy that made them

one again. It was a proof of the fulness of her friendship, that when her joy was at its full her heart went out without reserve in sympathy and fellowship to her friend. These communications had never ceased. With Vida's they formed the volumes in his library that were now personally the dearest to him; for at the close of each year he had had them bound and set among his choicest treasures. Thus, with the ocean between, his life seemed to run parallel with this trinity of life beyond its waves. Even Cyril King had written him a characteristic letter, in which he said that as he found it impossible to be rid of the rector of Dufferin, he was fain to endure him and to find out for himself what manner of fellow he was, by confessing his sins and stretching out the only hand he had left to him in fellowship.

Athel Dane's kindest impulses set slowly and reluctantly toward the man whose nature he believed had despoiled the fairest portion of his friend's life, — who by selfishness and untruth had robbed her so long of woman's best boon, love and home. He acknowledged this to himself, and for weeks did not reply. One day it half dawned upon his consciousness that he felt another, a fainter yet profounder repulsion to this man. What was it? Was it that he, Athel Dane, the rector of Dufferin, in his deepest heart rebelled against the thought of him because it was he who now possessed the soul that once made the only human light in his own existence? The moment he was sure that he could not deny to himself this repulsion, he made haste to extinguish it by answering at once in all honesty Cyril King's letter

Agnes' letters were unstudied revelations of other lands, of their inner life and unrecorded memories. She wrote him of music and its masters, of statues, pictures, and people; of grand cathedrals, old libraries, and famous shrines; but she wrote more, and with an infinite tenderness of recognition, of unrecorded lives, and of unemblazoned places, rich to her in the memory of some unchronicled soul, or in the presence of some human being who unconsciously made life fair or heroic.

Vida's letters at first were simply Vida's self. Over-frank, confiding, bursting with alternate loves and hates of all the new forms of life that she encountered, yet withal always a faithful record of her studies and progress to her "best beloved teacher." Then came a faithful transcript of her school life at Geneva, followed afterwards by pictures, rapid, vivid, of what she saw—the moonlit canals and mouldy palaces of Venice, the marvels of Rome (and to her its most wondrous marvels were its living models and beggars), the pictures that she copied, the languages that she studied, and the famous people that she knew.

These pictures throbbed and glowed with the wine of her youth, and her superabounding temperament, yet each year Vida as an individual receded more and more, till at last the Vida who began to write had vanished out of sight altogether. That she still existed in a developed and modified form was proved by these pictures that she painted of external things; but the outpouring Vida, telling her "darling teacher" over and over "how much she loved him," had utterly

reused to be. Athel Dane was perfectly cognizant of the vast distance measured in mental growth and culture between the first letters and the last. He was equally aware that he missed from the later letters something that he found in the first inexpressibly delightful, the love-outpouring of an impetuous, unconscious child. He dimly saw that she was more than six years older now than then, yet he could never see her in his thought other than as before, tall for her years and yet a child, in a white frock, with flowing hair, great soft eyes, and sweet, ardent, impetuous ways.

He was not thinking of her now, though in a few moments, after a long absence, he would meet her. He was thinking of her mother. He was riding slowly through the memory-haunted woods, with a sense of desired delay, of lingering, as he gathered into his heart and held fast each golden thread of the past, ere he lifted his reluctant face to confront the present. Possibly it was to be better, completer than his beloved past, this present, but he did not believe it. If it were to be, his perverse heart did not want it. Something in the very fibre of his frame shrank from change because it was change. Six years! They had touched her lightly he was sure, for had she not written him that they had been the happiest years of her life? She might look the very same that she did when he beheld her last in that room, and yet she and nothing there could seem the same, because of that third presence.

One hour before, he honestly believed that he was glad of this third presence, because with it he expected to see a light of happiness in her eyes that he had

never yet seen there ; and now that he was within a few moments' sight of that happiness, his heart, or some impulse in it, suddenly jumped up in revolt at the bare thought of the cause of that happiness. "If with all my striving I could only make him seem worthy of such a measureless good, I — I think I could rejoice that it is his," he said in self-defence.

This blast of swift revolt in no wise indicated the calm of his habitual mind. For years he had thought of Cyril King, as of course the husband of Agnes King ; he had sincerely and unselfishly rejoiced in her happiness, yet no less now, as he approached the cottage where he had known and worshipped, unconsciously, Agnes Darcy, he longed to see her Agnes Darcy still, her little daughter by her side, both unchanged, and "no stranger, no alien," as in his hot impulse he now called Cyril King, present. No wonder he rode slowly. Before he entered the repelling presence, he was sure that he had no easy task to perform, thus to bring into subjection an alien self, the law of his emotion making war upon the law of his mind and conscience. "It shall be brought under," he said, and his powerful steed moved yet more slowly than before.

According to the manner of novels, Vida, the young goddess, should have appeared to him just here in the shadow of the very tree where he once saw Vida the little wood-nymph, sitting amid the ferns, weaving autumn leaves into crosses and crowns. But the later Vida, sure that in all likelihood the rector of Dufferin would ride through the woods that afternoon, was far too modest and maidenly to place herself in his way

And she was just true maiden enough to hide herself out of sight where she, all undreamed-of, could watch for his coming and feast her eyes upon him unseen, In the little room that was so many years her mother's, by the window looking out upon the woods. through the veiling vines, Vida peered for the coming knight whose clerical bands in her memory and imagination were as knightly as chivalric spurs, and who, priest though he was, she was sure would appear mounted on a gallant charger.

This Vida, whom we have not seen for more than six years, and who is nearly nineteen years old, has the form of a young Athene. Few of her countrywomen at twenty-five have reached the same majesty of mien, without losing the suppleness of girlish outline. She has her father's superb proportions, the rich vitality of his temperament, his splendor of coloring, his mass of yellow, waving hair, her mother's tender mouth, and still her mother's eyes, luminous with intelligence and welling with the tenderness of a measureless capacity to love. What wonder that this face in a hundred guises looks down from the art studios of Florence and Rome; that the great artist, catching a glimpse of it in Paris, dedicated his next marvellous volume to "*la belle Américaine*;" that its loveliness, so fraught with every suggestion of womanly power and tenderness, so enkindling, so life-giving, so winning, should haunt still many, who met and responded unwittingly to those soft, asking eyes, — and then went their ways to hold them as a memory forever.

All these things are as if they had never been, to her this moment, as she sits peering through the cur-

taining vines to catch the first glimpse of the rector of Dufferin. He, and he only, this moment is in her mind and heart. She remembers, as if it were but yesterday, when he took her little hand and led her along Dufferin Street back to her mother; as if it were but yesterday, when he found her just within the woods, and she ran before him, a white-froaked herald, to announce him to her mother. How of the present it seemed again, those two years of learning, when he was her teacher! of what she learned! what an incentive to study was his smile of approval! Had she ever lost sight of its winning, in the last six years' ardent pursuit of knowledge? Consciously and unconsciously had it not been ever before her — that smile that he would give her again some day, when she came and laid her little hoard of priceless wisdom at his feet?

At least, this beloved teacher should be sure that she had made the very most and best of what God had given her of time, of opportunity, of power. He should say again: "Well done, little Vida." Alas! she was big now. Why had she grown so fearfully? If she could only have stayed small, she might run out now to meet him, when she saw him emerge from the woods, just as she used to do. She yearned to seem to herself just as she was when a little girl, and never felt afraid of him as she did now. "Oh, why was she afraid?" She could not tell. She was not afraid of other men. She scarcely thought of them at all. They pleased her for a moment, perhaps, as they passed before her eyes, but they did not come back again and again to her thought, and at last take up

their abode in her mind or heart; she did not quite know which it was that the rector of Dufferin had so constantly occupied for at least eight years of her short life.

If it had not been for the thought of him, — who knows? — she might have cared very much perhaps for the handsome and talented youth who cared so much for her in Rome; who wrote her such sonnets, who told her he must die if she did not love him; — and she tried and could not. Why? Because the more she tried, the more the rector of Dufferin filled all her mind, and made the love-making, sonnet-writing youth, and all other men as well, seem in her eyes poor indeed. She had seen many others, among them the very best that the earth could show, yet just the same as when he was the only one she knew, the rector of Dufferin reigned in her thoughts, the man of all men.

She was “little Vida” to him still, in spite of her bigness and her progress; she was sure of it, from the tone of his letters to her. And as a person he never seemed so distant to her as now, because with all her desire to see him she felt a strange fear of meeting him. After all he was but a man, and she could not worship him as when a little girl; she did not love him, — oh, surely no! — but it was most strange that he seemed to be in all her thoughts, that she had no power and no desire for power to put him out. Of course he had not changed; he was a man when she went away — a tall, slim, youthful man, more youthful than when she saw him first, when he looked very onesome and acted very old.

Upon all these thoughts broke a sound, — how long since she heard it before, yet how familiar it was, — the cracking of the dry boughs under “Prince Albert’s” feet, and then the soft thud of his feet on the velvety sod this side of the woods. It was Prince Albert, the blooded bay whom she used to call her “heart’s delight;” but who was this man who rode him? Who? Surely he was not the rector of Dufferin! Where was the slim, dark, melancholy youth, who had flourished so long in her memory and imagination? *He* looked very clerical; you would have recognized him as a priest of the Anglican Church had you met him in Timbuctoo. This stately man upon Prince Albert bore no insignia in the cut of his coat-collar or the shade of his necktie to proclaim his profession. He looked simply a gentleman, — yes, as Vida pressed her face closer against the vines she saw unmistakably a gentleman of noble mien and striking face, who looked the opposite of slim, sickly, or melancholy.

“Not an atom provincial,” murmured Vida to herself with a vivid blush, for not till that instant was she aware of the latent fear underlying her dreams of her childish idol, that when she came back from the world to the woods and beheld him again, even to her worshipping eyes he might look “queer.” Vida had a constitutional aversion to anything “queer.” Her harmonious nature demanded congruity. “He — I didn’t know that he was handsome. He is something better than *that*, — grand, distinguished. And he does not look the least old, though mamma says he is thirty-five. Men are not agreeable to me who look very young, or who are very young; they are

no pretentions. And oh, I want to be sure that I can look up to a man, and that he *is* wise. Such a man never assumes to be. Is *he* my dear teacher? and "—

By this time he was so near her vine lattice she could have touched his hand, had she leaned forth. She drew suddenly back. Her heart gave a great leap as if it were coming out.

"What if he saw me!" she said; "it would not seem modest, my peering out. But I am so glad, so happy to see him. Be still, my heart; you are worse than the old lump in my throat, for I cannot swallow you or hold you down. I am so glad, so glad!"

Athel Dane had passed to the front of the house, where she knew her father reclined by the open door and her mother sat reading to him. She heard the sweet, sudden greetings, the exclamations, the tones of inquiry and delight, which mark every friendly meeting; and at last in deep, rich tones she heard: "Where is our little Vida?"

Presently her mother opened the door of the room in which she sat, and said, "Come, my darling; your teacher wants you."

In another moment Athel Dane, looking up, saw in the front door of the log-house, standing a head taller than the mother by her side, a majestic maiden in white, her waist bound with a Roman girdle, her amber hair caught at the back of her head in shining coils, her eyes the eyes that had filled his soul so long to the exclusion of all others. Each seemed to pause and to gaze mutely upon the other. The child Vida had gone. The woman Vida stood in her place.

There is a sudden shock of joy as paralyzing as the

most smiting grief. There is a look that is recognition, revelation, acquaintance, love. In this as in the instant of death, Athel Dane seemed to see concentrated all his past, and all his future. As he moved on with outstretched hand, he knew that he took into his the hand of her for whose coming all his life and all his being had waited.

As he rode back through the Tarnstone woods at sunset, he threw up a transfigured face and said: "Friendship is friendship. Love is love. Each in itself is God's good and perfect gift."

Those who visit Tarnstone Pinnacle may see on the side of its Tarn a commodious house. A broad veranda runs around it, commanding a view in four directions. On one side you look out upon waters of the Tarn, as tremulously blue as ever, and up to the great Pinnacle green above it. On the other you gaze away to the Tarnstone woods, to the meadow, to the sparkling spring, and to a marble monument whose surmounting cross takes daily the sun's first rays and holds his last. Before you, you look across fields of clover and of waving grain to grassy hollows, to bordering woods, and to the mountains beyond, pushing their purple points up to the clouds.

This is the summer home of Athel and Vida Dane, of their children, and of Agnes their mother. Evelyn Dare still flourishes in the log-house beside the Pinnacle. She is rich enough to afford a bigger and better one, not built of logs; but she declares that she "would not take it for a gift," and some way Agnes in her heart of hearts is glad that she would not. Her

room in it remains unchanged, and there are few summer days when she is at the Pinnacle that she does not enter it, to think her own thoughts alone within its closed door.

The monument beside the woods bears the name

CYRIL KING.

and the little mound beside it marks the spot which received the transplanted dust of his boy. Cyril King's last days were his best days. He lived six peaceful years after his return from Europe. Years which shut him away, it is true, from actual participation in the world's affairs, but left him sufficiently free from acute suffering to seek and to find a peace that the world never gives, and to enjoy the pure delights of a perfect home. When he looked upon the radiant face of the happy Vida, and then at the serene face by his side, in whose loving eyes still lingered the shade of sorrow gone by, why he sometimes sighed as he looked, he knew best.

A deep friendship grew between him and Athel Dane. Each found suggestion and help in the comprehensive yet opposite mind of the other. But it was granted to Athel Dane, whose moral nature had so much the ampler growth, to turn the eyes of his friend from the gloom of retrospection to the quick, close vision of the future. His past was a tomb. It held his failures, his powers, his sins, his repentance. His present held forgiveness, love, help, inspiration; his future, waiting close, held reparation, growth, fruition.

"If I'd only known you in any sort of season,

Dane," he said in his man-of-the-world way, "and had got all this mystery of living and dying, and living again, in a sort of way adjusted duly in my mind by talking it all over with a fellow like you, I might have taken a fairer and higher start, and have been a better man. But I grew up a heathen, didn't I, Aggie?"

"You grew up with almost no chance, Cyril dear, it is sad to say."

Athel Dane's eyes rested upon her face with a reverential tenderness touched with inquiry.

"I know what you are wondering over, Dane. It's how a man with such a wife who loved him, and whom he loved, could have got so far astray?"

"Yes. That is just what I am wondering over."

"And *you* would keep on wondering to the day of doom. You theological chaps, somehow, all seem to have been wrapped up in cotton wool all your days to keep you from soiling. As a class you have a touch-me-if-you-dare look. And you feel so almighty fine, I should think you'd be just the ones to snub your wives. *You don't*, but it's because you've learned better. But you do know that nine men out of ten when they marry feel themselves to be such terribly fine fellows, and invested with such power and authority, they would rather lose their souls than to condescend to be shown by their wives how to save them. As for me, I doubt if I had any at that time. Aggie was religious, and I thought she ought to be because she was a woman. She might just as well have undertaken to convert a turkey gobbler as me. When I recall how I strutted, and spread myself, and lorded

it over her, my only wonder is that she endured me at all. If she had hated me I would have got no more than my deserts."

"Why, Cyril!"

"It's all true, Aggie. If you only had a touch of the flame in you that your daughter inherits from her sire, you would have had an ever so much easier time."

"Now, papa! *please* don't speak so. You make me feel as if I wasn't lovable; and I haven't felt a ball in my throat for ever so long."

"For how long?"

"Since — last night. It's you always, that vexes me, papa, never Athel, nor mamma."

"That's because we are too much alike. You are an exception to the rest of mankind in my opinion, Dane," Cyril went on. "By nature a man instinctively dislikes his mother-in-law. I don't know whether it was by grace, or what, but I've always had a suspicion that you were more than half in love with yours, I was awfully jealous of you for a long time," and Cyril King laughed aloud at the thought.

"What do you think about it, Vida?" asked Athel Dane.

"I think you cared altogether for mamma for a long, long time, when I was a little girl."

"You are right. I care no less for her now. Yet I am in love with you."

"I should be miserable if you were not," said the young wife, "and I should be miserable if you did not love mamma."

"Amen," said Cyril King "You don't feel the

slightest misgiving about it, Dane?" after a moment's silence, his mind coming back to the subject on which it continually dwelt, "not the slightest misgiving but that even a fellow like me will have a chance, some chance, to restore his wasted powers, to atone for his misspent days, to grow into a creature holier and happier through the mercy of God, in the Hereafter?"

His final call came gently and in sleep. They laid his body where he wished, beside the graves of Linda and little Cyril; and in the inclosed space, green and garnished with the tenderest flowers, there is abundant room for the beloved who in God's good time will follow after. Athel Dane is no longer the rector of Dufferin. He has gone forth to wider labors, yet in the summer Sabbaths he often officiates in the great stone church on the street where his earlier ministry is held in proud and loving remembrance.

Often in the halcyon mornings, a gayly painted boat, laden with a happy family, may be seen gliding through the sparkling ripples of the Tarn to the open room of rock below the Pinnacle. Sometimes it is rowed by a stalwart man, with a fine, powerful face; sometimes by a woman young, deep-chested, golden-haired, life-inspiring as the Olympian Hera. Glad children sit at her feet, and before her her mother, upon whose face her large open eyes rest often, with a look of loving and ineffable content. Upon that mother's dark locks the evening gray is falling. Thought, sorrow, love, faith, inspiration, are the exquisite limners that have touched her features and suffused her eyes with a beauty inexpressible, the beauty beyond beauty, the outraying of

the immortal spirit, which can never be caught and imprisoned in speech.

The world hears less of Agnes than it once did. At times her thought, like a strain of high, pure music, penetrates its discords, lifting them for the moment into harmony. But she who is elected to feed the holy lamp upon the inmost shrine must ever minister less and less in the outer court. To live is better than to speak. To love in its pure significance is the consummation of being.

Agnes made the "meanness of opportunity" serve her, lifting it and her selfhood together to higher heights. She made sorrow a servitor upon growth and upon holiness. Now with peace unspeakable she draws nearer to the final gate that we call death, and sometimes dread, forgetting that it can cast its shadow upon us but for a moment, as we pass through it, **outward, from life unto life.**

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